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Hafa Adai!

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9th Circuit: FICA applies to all

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
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REPORTER

» Concorde Garment, its former Chinese workers to file petition for rehearing

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit has affirmed the district court's ruling that temporary foreign workers in the CNMI and their employers are required to pay Federal Insurance Contributions Act taxes, which fund Social Security and Medicare.

The Ninth Circuit said Section 606(b) of the Covenant governing U.S.-CNMI relations provides that U.S. laws that impose excise taxes to support the Social Security system apply to the CNMI as they apply to Guam.

"Because FICA is a law that imposes an excise tax to support the Social Security system, it applies to the CNMI as it applies to Guam," said the Ninth Circuit in a 25-page opinion last week.

In return, the Ninth Circuit said, FICA applies to all workers and their employers in

See FICA on Page 4

3 bids for land use master plan

By DENNIS B. CHAN
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REPORTER

The competitive bid process for a master plan to oversee public land use in the CNMI has received three proposals, according to Department of Public Lands Secretary Pete A. Tenorio.

In a recent email to *Saipan Tribune*, Tenorio said they have received three proposals ranging in cost from $100,000 to over $700,000.

"…So a decision is quite tough and we are now evaluating the pros and cons," Tenorio said. "[We are] working with Procurement to arrive at a most fair and responsive decision regarding awarding a contract."

The CNMI's existing land use plan is outdated. Issues surrounding public land use are also often one of the most political and contentious issues in the Commonwealth. The updated land use plan is intended to guide DPL in making decisions consistent with other land use management elements,

See BIDS on Page 4

MOCHI MAKING
Paseo de Marianas Promoters official Misako Kamata, right, prepares to wet and turn the mochigome before it is pounded by a wooden mallet in last Saturday's Mochitsuki Festival at the Paseo de Marianas in Garapan.
JON PEREZ

See story on Page 4; more photos on Page 14

Deep vents found in rarely explored Mariana Back-arc

By DENNIS B. CHAN
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REPORTER

A Schmidt Ocean Institute research vessel has increased the number of known hydrothermal vent sites from three to seven after discovering four new areas of activity in the Marianas Back-Arc, an area west of the Mariana Trench where tectonic plate are spreading and underwater volcanic activity are concentrated.

One of these newly discovered vents is among the deepest ever found, at a depth

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INSIDE

LOCAL
Two brothers raise $1,233.42 to benefit the Make-A-Wish Foundation's Wish Kids.
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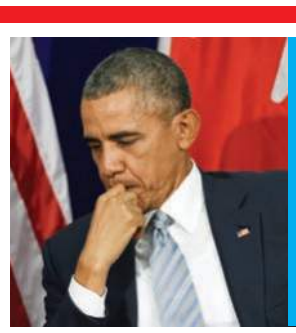

NATION
In his final year, President Barack Obama seeks to stave off his lame-duck status.
» PAGE 15

WORLD
The Islamic State group claims that their self-styled "caliphate" is doing well.
» PAGE 17

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Local

Melvin Ada appeals sentence to the Ninth Circuit

Melvin Garong Ada, a former Commonwealth Healthcare Corp. staff who was recently slapped with a sentence of 12.7 years in prison for stealing over $1.7 million from the corporation, is appealing to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit.

Ada, through counsel Colin Thompson, notified the U.S. District Court for the NMI last week about his appeal to the Ninth Circuit.

Ada said he is appealing to the Ninth Circuit to reverse his 12.7 years sentence.

In the notice of appeal, Thompson requested the U.S. District Court for the NMI to provide him a transcript during the sentencing hearing.

No other details were provided in the defendant's notice of appeal.

Last Dec. 17, U.S. District Court for the NMI Chief Judge Ramona V. Manglona handed down the sentence of 12.7 years in prison against Ada, for 19 counts of theft or embezzlement in connection with health care, nine counts of health care fraud, and 28 counts of money laundering.

Ada was ordered to immediately pay $5,300 in court assessment fee.

The judge also granted the U.S. government's motion for money judgment in the amount of $1.8 million, representing the total gross proceeds Ada obtained as a result of his criminal conduct.

Ada's wife, Leyda, was acquitted last June of charges of conspiracy to commit money laundering and money laundering. The jury, however, found her guilty of perjury. She has yet to be sentenced. ***(Ferdie de la Torre)***

Horror film partially shot on Saipan now in post-production

By DAISY DEMAPAN
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REPORTER

Film director Hiroshi Katagiri visited Saipan early this month to shoot scenes near Aquarius Beach Tower for a horror film called *Gehenna – Where Death Lives*.

Katagiri, a native of Japan, specializes in makeup effects and was the go-to effects guy for three films directed by Steven Spielberg including *Jurassic Park, A.I.,* and *War of the Worlds*. He has also assisted in films such as *Wolverine, Pirates of the Caribbean, Alien v. Predator Requiem, Cabin in the Woods*, and *The Hunger Games.*

According to IMBD.com, Katagiri has written and directed several acclaimed horror shorts and now pursues his ultimate dream of producing and directing a full-length feature horror film.

His group, based out of Los Angeles, visited Saipan to search for film locations that, according to a summary of the film's plot, includes "a hidden cave-like structure on the property which they decide to explore but are soon to find out that curiosity can kill as each member faces their most private secrets and the secrets of the bunker itself resulting in a most shocking conclusion…"

The $239,000 Kickstarter project is currently in post-production in L.A. after Katagiri finalized exterior shots on Saipan on Dec. 15.

Special effects master Hiroshi Katagiri fulfills his dream of directing and producing a feature length horror film using scenes on Saipan. The film is currently in its post-production in Los Angeles.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

According to Katagiri, Saipan was chosen because of the Battle of Saipan, which took place during World War II in 1944.

"Known for some of the fiercest fighting of the war, with heavy casualties, a determination to fight down to the last man, its many suicides, and rumors of far worse, the island periphery consists of beaches, lagoons, cliffs, and reefs, and its interior is mountainous. It has many caves, which were used during the war for hiding during the day, and making sorties at night," later referred to as Hell's Pocket and Death Valley, Saipan is a place laden with superstition and folklore, with some real life horror embedded in its 20th century history, he said.

He is currently offering collectible limited edition Gehenna bojobo dolls until Jan. 18 for those wanting to support the film.

For more information on the film, log on to www.gehennafilm.com.

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Man gets two-month prison term for punching girlfriend

A sex offender who punched his girlfriend during an argument at their house in Kagman 2 has been slapped with a 60-day prison sentence.

Thirty-year-old Dickson Teruo Cosmes was allowed to start serving his prison term at the Department of Corrections on Jan. 3, 2016, at 8am.

Cosmes is expected to be released from DOC's custody on Feb. 26, 2016, at 8am as he was given credit for time served.

After completing his prison sentence, Cosmes will be placed on supervised probation for two years. He was ordered to pay a total fine in the amount of $300, $50 court costs, and $200 probation fee. He was required to perform 150 hours of community service.

Superior Court Associate Judge Kenneth L. Govendo directed Cosmes to abide by the terms and conditions of the Sex Offender Registry, including notifying the Department of Public Safety of any address change within two days and not living in a household with any non-biological minors.

For not complying with the registration requirements of the Sex Offender Registry, Cosmes was sentenced to two years, all suspended except for 60 days, including the seven days of time served.

For assault and battery, Cosmes was sentenced to one year imprisonment, all suspended except for 30 days, including seven days of time served.

The sentence shall be concurrent to the first offense. That means the total prison term on both counts is 60 days.

Cosmes was also ordered to attend anger management counseling at the Community Guidance Center.

At a change of plea hearing last week, Cosmes pleaded guilty to noncompliance with the Sex Offender Registry registration requirements and assault and battery. The remaining charge of disturbing the peace was dropped as part of the plea deal.

According to the plea agreement, in December 2014 to Feb. 17, 2015, on Saipan, Cosmes failed to update a change in his residence with DPS when he moved into the home of his girlfriend in Kagman II.

On Feb. 17, 2015, Cosmes punched the victim in the face for checking her Facebook account.

Police detective Rhonda C. John stated in her report that a police officer responded to a residence in Kagman II last Feb. 17, at 8:40pm, in response to a domestic violence incident.

The victim told police she was inside the bedroom of her sister when Cosmes accused her of looking for a boyfriend on Facebook. He then punched her in the face. She took a butane gas container and hit him with it on the head.

Police learned that on Dec. 11, 2001, Cosmes admitted to the offense of rape and served prison term.

Police found out that there are minors in the house, in violation of Sex Offender Act, prohibiting him from staying at a residence where minors are present. ***(Ferdie de la Torre)***

Air Force training at FDM

ASAN, Guam—The U.S. Air Force will conduct training at the island of Farallon de Medinilla on Dec. 29-30, from 9:30am to 3:30pm. The general public, especially fishermen, commercial pilots, and marine tour operators, are advised to stay clear of the area during the dates and times indicated.

The general location of the training on the island of Farallon de Medinilla will be on a 12-nautical mile radius on all quadrants. Farallon de Medinilla plays a special and unique role in national defense because its location provides frequent access that supports established training requirements. ***(PR)***

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Welcoming the New Year with Mochitsuki Festival

By JON PEREZ
jon_perez@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

The Paseo de Marianas Promoters, Inc. began their preparation for the coming year with the Japanese Mochitsuki Festival last Saturday, which also marked the end of the Christmas in the Marianas Festival.

Using an *usu*, a stone stamp mill, and *kine* or a large wooden mallet, participants pounded *mochigome*—a special kind of glutinous short-grain japonica rice—to make *mochi*, Japanese sweet rice cake.

The ceremony began at 6pm in front of the Kinpachi Restaurant at the Paseo de Marianas.

PDM Promoters members alternately pounded the steamed rice into a very sticky mass, keeping time to the beat of a medium-sized *taiko* drum.

"This is the old-fashioned way of preparing *mochi* or rice cakes. People then shout '*Yoisho*,' which means give me your power as the rice is being pounded," said PDM Promoters official Misako Kamata.

The centuries-old Japanese way of making *mochi* requires strength, quick hands, and timing, with one person beating the *mochigome* while another flips and wets the glutinous mass so it won't stick to the wooden mallet or mortar.

Timing is needed to avoid injury, as rhythm is needed in lowering the wooden mallet and swift flipping of the mochi.

Minutes of pounding the glutinous rice produced a smooth dough that is cut and prepared into small cakes. Some were wrapped in nori—a type of edible seaweed—dipped in soy sauce or cooked with red bean sauce.

Tourists and locals, along with Marianas Visitors Authority community projects manager Martin Duenas, and Department of Public Safety's Jason Tarkong also joined in the *mochi* pounding.

"Making rice cakes has been part of the Japanese culture and tradition. It is an end-of-the-year ceremony to prepare for the New Year, where we eat the rice cakes," added Kamata.

Kinpachi Restaurant staff then prepared the *mochi* where everyone was treated to a free taste of the sweet and delectable rice cake.

DEEP

From Page 1

of 4,230 meters or 13,900 feet, according to the Schmidt Ocean Institute in statement this month. There are about 700 vent sites known globally and only three other vents are known to extend deeper than the newly discovered vents.

Scientists aboard the 28-day expedition on the R/V *Falkor* also discovered a recently erupted lava field that is "likely only a few months old."

According to the institute, the region probably only experiences eruptions no more than once a century, making the 400 feet long lava flows discovered an exceptional find. Scientists were able to observe cloudy warm water leaking through the still-cooling lavas.

"When [the autonomous underwater vehicle] *Sentry* came back on board and we looked at the photo survey our jaws just dropped," said co-chief scientist Bill Chadwick. "There was this brand new lava flow on the sea floor, which looks like it could have come out yesterday… It's in a fascinating part of the Back-arc with whopping hydrothermal signals."

NOAA Pacific Marine Environmental Laboratory Cooperative Institute scientists Dr. Joe Resing, from the University of Washington, and Chadwick, from Oregon State University,

Photograph of the seafloor showing the edge of a recently erupted lava flow (dark in lower half of image) that was discovered during the R/V *Falkor* expedition.

SOI/AUV SENTRY

led the monthlong expedition.

Scientists also used multibeam sonar and chemical and optical sensors to hunt for new hydrothermal oases on a track that explored a 400-mile stretch of seafloor in the area of the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument, the institute said in their statement.

BIDS

From Page 1

agencies, and stakeholders with a "planning horizon of 10 years," according DPL's request for proposal package.

The winning firm will consult and develop a "common vision and roadmap" for public land use in the CNMI. The firm will be tasked with understanding the current statutes, regulations and land use conditions in the CNMI; conduct public outreach and coordinate government agencies; and analyze current economics, population demographics, and socio-economic trends to forecasts future land requirements over a 10-year build out.

The firm must also develop an inventory of public and private lands and their current uses, among several other tasks.

The winning firm's scope of work includes identifying all public lands on Rota, Tinian, Saipan, and the Northern Islands and its priority of uses, the RFP package states. The firm will also identify and reserve suitable land for homestead programs and must identify and reserve lands that contain resources deemed critical to the Commonwealth like potable springs, groundwater aquifers, current and future sites for government buildings, wetlands, potential school, hospital, and transportation corridor sites, among others.

FICA

From Page 1

Guam, regardless of their citizenship.

Therefore, the Ninth Circuit said, FICA applies to all workers and their employers in the CNMI, including the defunct Concorde Garment Manufacturing Corp. on Saipan and Chinese national, nonresident workers formerly employed at Concorde, regardless of their citizenship.

Concorde's lawyer, Steven P. Pixley, said they are very disappointed with the Ninth Circuit's decision to affirm the U.S. District Court for the NMI's dismissal of their claim for reimbursement of Social Security payments made by former garment workers and their employer.

"We will be filing a petition for rehearing in the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals," Pixley said.

Colin M. Thompson is counsel for the over 400 Chinese workers in this case.

According to court records, Concorde filed Forms 941 "Employer's Quarterly Tax Returns," for the quarters ending March 31, 2006, June 30, 2006, Sept. 30, 2006, and Dec. 31, 2006. Concorde paid the amount due for the FICA taxes for those quarters. Concorde then filed a Form 843 "Claim for Refund," requesting a refund for those quarters, asserting that its temporary contract workers in the CNMI were not subject to FICA taxes and that it therefore erroneously paid payroll taxes for those employees.

On Dec. 28, 2009, IRS refunded Concorde's 2006 FICA taxes in the amount of $1,181,265.71.

In July 2011, Concorde and over 4,000 Chinese nationals formerly employed by Concorde and its affiliated companies sued the U. S. government to recover the remainder of the FICA taxes they had paid.

In 2011, the U.S. counterclaimed to recover the refund of Concorde's 2006 FICA taxes, which it argued was erroneously issued. The U.S. government argued that Concorde's claim was without legal basis and should not have been allowed.

U.S. District Court for the NMI Chief Judge Ramona V. Manglona then ruled that all workers and their employers in the CNMI are subject to FICA, regardless of the citizenship of either.

Concorde and its former Chinese national workers appealed, asking the Ninth Circuit to reverse the district court's ruling.

Concorde and its former Chinese workers argued that the Covenant was intended to subject only CNMI citizens, not temporary nonresident foreign workers, to FICA taxes. They argued that even if FICA generally applies to all workers and their employers in the CNMI, employees are entitled to the FICA tax exemption for temporary nonresident Filipino workers in Guam.

The appellants also argued that even if the first two arguments are rejected, the employee portion of FICA does not apply because it is an income tax, and only excise and self-employment taxes that support Social Security apply to the CNMI.

The appellants asserted that the statutory basis for applying FICA to appellants is unconstitutionally vague.

FICA imposes an employer and an employee tax on wages "with respect to employment."

In affirming Manglona's ruling, the Ninth Circuit said the district court correctly held that appellants, who paid and received wages for services performed in the CNMI, are required to pay FICA taxes on those wages, even though employees are temporary nonresident Chinese nationals.

The Ninth Circuit said Covenant Section 606(b) is not limited to citizens or residents of Guam or the CNMI.

To begin with, the Ninth Circuit judges said, Section 606(b) does not mention citizenship or people, and that they see no reason to read those words into the Covenant.

Moreover, the Ninth Circuit judges said, even if they were to read references to geographic areas as references to people in those geographic areas, their reading would not be limited to citizens.

The Ninth Circuit said FICA applies to the CNMI as it applies to Guam—where nonresident workers are subject to FICA tax on employee wages because they performed work "within the United States," regardless of whether they were temporary nonresident workers.

By its terms, the Ninth Circuit said, FICA never applies solely based upon a worker's citizenship. Rather, it applies in two instances: (1) when work is performed within the United States, and (2) when work is performed by a U.S. citizen for an American employer.

The judges said there is no indication that FICA was intended to have such a limited effect within the CNMI.

"Indeed, because CNMI citizens became U.S. citizens under the Covenant—meaning they already must pay FICA taxes when working for an American employer—such an outcome would render Section 606(b) meaningless," the judges said.

Appellants argued that even if FICA applies to nonresident workers and their employers in the CNMI, appellants fit within an exemption to FICA taxation that Congress created for certain nonresident workers in Guam.

But the Ninth Circuit said the exemption is expressly limited to Filipino citizens admitted to Guam under H-2 visas. The Ninth Circuit judges said this section of FICA exempts from the definition of employment any "service performed in Guam by a resident of the Republic of the Philippines, while in Guam on a temporary basis as a nonimmigrant alien admitted to Guam pursuant to a section of the Immigration and Nationality Act."

"Pursuant to Covenant Section 606(b), then, Filipinos admitted to the CNMI under H-2 visas arguably would be exempt from FICA," the judges said. However, the judges said, even if they overlook the fact that employees were not admitted to the CNMI pursuant to H-2 visas, the exemption remains plainly inapplicable because employees in this case are Chinese nationals.

"We need not decide whether the exemption would apply to Filipinos in the CNMI who were not admitted pursuant to H-2 visas but were instead admitted pursuant to the CNMI's local immigration law," the Ninth Circuit judges said.

This is a close question, said the judges, citing that during the relevant time period—2004 to 2007—the CNMI was not subject to the Immigration and Naturalization Act, and instead maintained the authority to create its own immigration laws.

Accordingly, the judges said, from 2004 to 2007, temporary workers entered the CNMI pursuant to the CNMI's Nonresident Workers Act.

"Thus, although temporary nonresident Filipinos in the CNMI are the exact type of worker Congress sought to exempt from FICA, these workers do not technically satisfy all statutory elements of the exemption," they said.

Moreover, the judges said, Filipinos were not the only temporary nonresident workers in Guam when the exemption was created.

In light of this demographic reality, the Ninth Circuit judges said, Congress' decision to expressly limit the exemption to Filipinos, in part because of the nation's unique political ties with the Philippines, suggests that the exemption was not meant to cover all nonresident workers in Guam.

In sum, the Ninth Circuit said, Congress singled out Filipinos for preferential treatment.

Because it is undisputed that employees in this case are not Filipinos, the exemption does not apply to them, the judges said.

The judges said FICA and Self-Employment Contributions Act apply in their entirety to the CNMI as they apply to Guam.

Appellants contended that even if FICA generally applies to the CNMI, the employee portion does not apply because it is an income tax, not an excise or self-employment tax.

In other words, the judges said, appellants read Section 606(b) as if it contains an additional limitation: "Those laws of the United States which impose only excise taxes and only self-employment taxes to support… the United States Social Security system will…become applicable to the [CNMI] as they apply to Guam."

The judges said this is a misreading of the provision. They noted that Section 606(b) does not contain the limitation suggested by appellants, nor does it state that excise taxes apply in the CNMI as in Guam.

Instead, the judges said, Section 606(b) provides that those which impose such taxes apply in the CNMI as in Guam.

In short, the judges said, if a law imposes an excise tax to support Social Security, the law—not just that part of the law imposing an excise tax—applies in the CNMI as in Guam.

"Because FICA imposes an excise tax, it applies in the CNMI as in Guam. And because FICA subjects employees in Guam to taxation, it subjects employees in the CNMI to FICA taxes as well," the judges said.

In Guam, they said, employees are subject to FICA, and thus the same holds true in the CNMI, regardless of whether that tax is an excise tax or an income tax.

The judges said it is the law containing the excise tax that applies to the CNMI as to Guam, not merely the "excise tax" itself.

The judge said appellants' position is not frivolous, and they were justified in requesting a refund from the IRS. "But having a colorable argument that FICA taxes do not apply does not render the statute unconstitutionally vague," the judges said.

"Moreover, it does not appear that appellants face any penalty. They simply must pay the tax," the Ninth Circuit judges added.

A hectic year ahead for Public Works

By JON PEREZ
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REPORTER

The Department of Public Works will have a busy year ahead in 2016. This early, DPW Secretary James Ada is hoping that his agency would finish all projects on time.

In an interview with *Saipan Tribune* last Thursday, Ada said that among DPW's priority is the renovation of the sports facilities inside the Oleai Sports Complex that were damaged by Typhoon Soudelor.

"Right now, we are doing our scope of work for the [Francisco M. Palacios] Tan Ko baseball field, [Miguel Pangelinan] Tan Ge softball field, the Ada gym, and the track," said Ada.

He said the only things included in the track facility are the steel fence and the broken enclosure for the hammer throw since it is also due for resurfacing from a separate funding source early next year.

Restoring the Beach Road pathway to its former state is also part of DPW's development plan, according to Ada.

"We're going to bring the pathway back to shape and light it up for the safety of tourists and people who jog, walk, and bike there. A private engineer is helping us," Ada said. He said that DPW would install a different type of LED lights to illuminate the pathway as well as the area in Garapan from Bank of Saipan to Paseo de Marianas.

On Tinian, the road from the Tinian International Airport to the beach is due for resurfacing while a water tank will also be built.

On Rota, the street connecting the Rota International Airport to the downtown area would be paved.

Ada said most of DPW's projects are locally funded and his department is set to receive more equipment that will help speed up the completion of their work.

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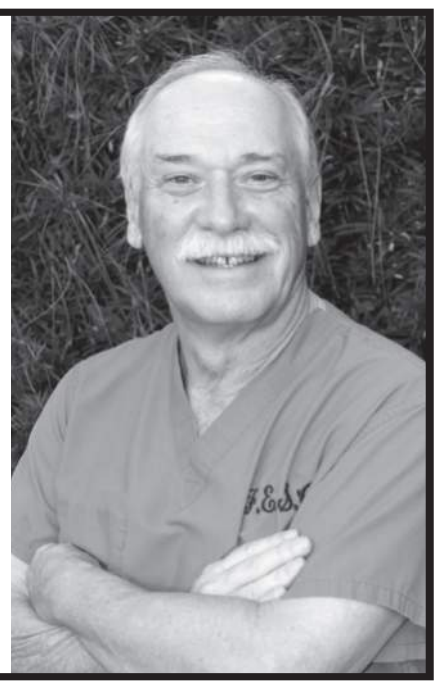

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Kia Rio LX retail price $16,995.00 less 20% downpayment. Financing at 7% APR for 60 monthly payments of $269.22 or $124.26 per paycheck based on 26 pay periods per year. Total deferred payment $16,153.20.
Kia Forte LX retail price $17,995.00 less 20% downpayment. Financing at 7% APR for 60 monthly payments of $285.06 or $131.57 per paycheck based on 26 pay periods per year. Total deferred payment $17,103.60.
Kia Soul LX retail price $18,995.00 less 20% downpayment. Financing at 7% APR for 60 monthly payments of $300.90 or $138.88 per paycheck based on 26 pay periods per year. Total deferred payment $18,054.00.
Kia Sportage LX retail price $22,495.00 less 20% downpayment. Financing at 7% APR for 60 monthly payments of $356.34 or $164.46 per paycheck based on 26 pay periods per year. Total deferred payment $21,380.40.
Kia Sedona LX retail price $30,995.00 less 20% downpayment. Financing at 7% APR for 60 monthly payments of $490.99 or $226.61 per paycheck based on 26 pay periods per year. Total deferred payment $29,459.40.
Kia Cadenza Premium retail price $35,995 less 20% downpayment. Financing at 7% APR for 60 monthly payments of $570.20 or $263.17 per paycheck based on 26 pay periods per year. Total deferred payment $34,212.00.

Tinian mayor hopes for Dynasty casino reopening

By DAISY DEMAPAN
daisy_demapan@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Despite Tinian Dynasty Hotel & Casino's bankruptcy filing on Dec. 11 and numerous "willful and repeat violations" of the overtime provisions of the Fair Labor Standards Act, Tinian Mayor Joey Patrick San Nicolas remains optimistic that the casino will reopen.

He concedes that the decision of when the casino will reopen is a matter that is beyond his control or scope of authority.

"It is my hope however, that the casino will soon reopen so that it may begin generating much needed revenues that supplement many essential programs and delivery of services for the people of Tinian," San Nicolas said.

After the casino's shutdown in September, many employees under the Tinian Mayor's Office were furloughed as many staffers were paid using revenue collected from the casino.

Remaining upbeat about the casino's resumption of operation, San Nicolas named five nominees to the Tinian Casino Gaming Control Commission last month: Antonio SN. Borja, Jose Kiyoshi, Jose Dela Cruz, David Cing, and Charlene Lizama.

"Specifically, the Gaming Act as codified under 10 CMC, Section 2521(b) states that the mayor shall appoint from a list of qualified candidates. This list shall be composed by the Office of the Mayor...[and] include nominees from all Tinian political parties which are registered with the Commonwealth of Board of Elections," San Nicolas said. To be eligible, a person must be 25 years old, a domiciliary of Tinian for not less than five years and a qualified voter of Tinian preceding his or her appointment, not convicted of a felony, and of a good moral character.

"As you can see from the language of the Gaming Act, like appointments to other boards and commissions within the CNMI, the appointment of a commissioner is a discretionary function of the sitting mayor," he said.

Last week, TCGCC executive director Lucy Blanco-Maratita said that the Tinian Dynasty has not met all the conditions the commission set in order for the casino to reopen at what was originally thought to be Dec. 15.

In order for the casino to open, Maratita said that Tinian must have a fully functioning gaming commission, which has yet to happen, adding that other casino license applicants Alter City Group, Bridge Investment Group and the bankruptcy filing of Tinian Dynasty are currently being addressed.

SHRM NMI sets annual conference on Dec. 29

The Society for Human Resource Management NMI Chapter will have its 2015 Annual Conference tomorrow, Dec. 29, at the Pacific Islands Club's Charley's Cabaret. All SHRM members and other interested HR and management practitioners are invited to come and enjoy this final meeting of 2015.

The one-half day program will feature acting governor Ralph DLG Torres as its main speaker. Torres will discuss the ongoing push for 902 talks with the federal government and what the business community can expect in the coming year.

This year's program will cover two topics. Attorneys Maya Kara and Bruce Mailman will join the morning session to address the increasingly significant issue of visa options for nonresident workers. After lunch, attorney Mark Hanson will speak on the topic of determining an employee's overtime status.

Both issues are of current interest and significance to all HR professionals and managers. These topics will help bring HR practitioners up-to-date on the visa and green card process, as well as help properly classify employees to ensure compliance with the law.

This lunch meeting will be held at the PIC Charley's on Tuesday, Dec. 29, 2015, from 8am to 2pm. The program will open with registration and morning snacks at 8am, with the welcoming remarks at 9am, followed by the morning program. There will be a break for lunch at 11:30am to 12:30pm with the acting governor's address, followed by the afternoon program.

This presentation is open to the public and will be an invaluable opportunity for employers and HR professionals and staff to better understand their visa options and the process for determining overtime status.

The presentation includes the PIC lunch buffet at the cost of $30 for SHRM members and $40 for non-members. Seats are limited, so reserve your seat by contacting Micah Parico-Acuavera by phone at 234-1795 or by email at corpoffice@triplej-saipan.com or by email to Frank Gibson at flgibson@yahoo.com. ***(SHRM)***

BNP Paribas considering strategic options for FHB

HONOLULU, Hawaii—BNP Paribas Group, the sole owner of First Hawaiian Bank, announced Friday that it is considering strategic alternatives with respect to its subsidiary, First Hawaiian Bank. Among such alternatives, under consideration is a proposed initial public offering of the business and operations of First Hawaiian Bank, which could occur in 2016 after the completion of certain corporate restructuring transactions.

This announcement is being made pursuant to and in accordance with Rule 135 under the Securities Act of 1933. This press release does not constitute an offer to sell or the solicitation of an offer to buy securities, and shall not constitute an offer, solicitation or sale in any jurisdiction in which such offer, solicitation or sale would be unlawful prior to registration or qualification under the securities laws of that jurisdiction.

First Hawaiian Bank (www.FHB.com), with $18.9 billion in total assets, operates 57 branches in Hawaii, three on Guam, and two on Saipan. ***(FHB)***

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NOTE: This prices do not include breakfast.
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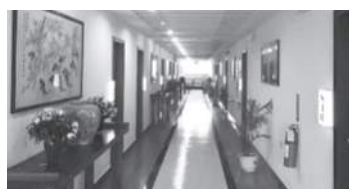

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Kids help raise funds for Wish Kids

Brothers Christian and Ruben Guerrero (with the help of their parents, godsister Sydney Villagomez, and other friends and family) organized a holiday "Kids for Wish Kids" Bake Sale and Charity Drive last Dec. 19 to benefit the Make-A-Wish Foundation's Wish Kids.

Friends and family members from the community supported the two brothers in their efforts to help raise funds for Wish Kids, whose lives are challenged with life-threatening illnesses. As a way to make these children's lives a bit brighter, Christian, Ruben and their friends raised $275 in cash pledges from supporters, $844.76 in the sale of baked goods and $113.66 in change drive funds. In total, the boys managed to raise an impressive $1,233.42.

Make-A-Wish sincerely appreciates the tremendous support of companies and individuals who charitably contributed to the 2015 Kids for Wish Kids Bake Sale & Change Drive: Agnes Cabrera, Felix Cabrera, Mariana Tenorio, Arlene/Joe C. Dela Cruz, Frances T. Ramon, Mateo Guerrero, Chilang Villagomez, Jared Terlaje, Mellie Tenorio, Connie Cabrera, Togawa John/Betty Terlaje Mike/Maisie Tenorio, Cora Ada, Kanae Quinn, Sherry Tenorio, Crystal Cabrera, Karl Villagomez Bier, Nick Ramon Jr., Daisy V. Bier, Kiana Propst Patrick/Michelle Guerrero, Daisy/Ed Propst, Lola Guerrero, Rian Cabrera Sonoda, Debra Cabrera, Lorraine C. Maui, Rosita S. Waldron, Devin Propst, Manuel/Elizabeth Villagomez, Sage Villagomez, Ena Villagomez, Tony/May Guerrero, Shirley Sablan, Tracy/Dave Guerrero, Tony/Rita Guerrero, Sydney Villagomez, Herman's Modern Bakery, Transcends, LLC, and Warren/Antonette Villagomez,

Make-A-Wish continues its work to transform dreams into reality. In addition, Make-A-Wish requests the community's support in helping with referrals for potential Wish Kids who face life-threatening medical conditions. Anyone in our community can make a referral so please let us know of any family whose child may be eligible. You may contact us through our local number (670) 483-9474 (WISH). ***(MAWF)***

Children help raise funds through a holiday "Kids for Wish Kids" Bake Sale and Charity Drive last Dec. 19 to benefit the Make-A-Wish Foundation's Wish Kids.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

The bake sale featured holiday-inspired yummy treats.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Commonwealth Utilities Corporation
Office of the Executive Director

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS
CUC-RFP-16-002

Typhoon Soudelor Disaster Recovery Project - CUC Central Warehouse Repairs

The Office of the Executive Director of the Commonwealth Utilities Corporation (CUC) is soliciting competitive sealed proposals for repairs at CUC Central Warehouse in Lower Base, Saipan. As this project is time sensitive, contractors shall ensure that they have a good understanding of the project prior to making their bid proposal to avoid protracted contract discussion that will result in a successful expedited contract award to the selected Offeror.

The Scope of Work and Solicitation Package will be emailed upon request, by CUC Procurement & Supply Office from 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., Monday to Friday, except on government observed holidays, **until December 15, 2015**. Prospective proponents for this RFP must register with the CUC Procurement & Supply Division no later than 2:00 p.m. on December 15, 2015 in order to be considered.

A **mandatory Pre-proposal Conference** will be conducted at the Warehouse Building in Lower Base, Saipan on **December 15, 2015 at 10:00 a.m., ChST.** Immediately after the conference, Site Visits to Warehouse facility will be arranged. Proposers shall familiarize themselves with the site conditions prior to submitting the proposal.

One (1) original and five (5) hard copies, along with an electronic copy of the proposal on a compact disk in PDF format must be submitted in a sealed envelope marked "CUC Central Warehouse Repairs, CUC-RFP-16-002" to the CUC Procurement & Supply Office, 3rd Floor, Room No. 3, Joeten Dandan Commercial Building, P.O. Box 501220, Saipan, MP 96950, no later than **December 31, 2015 at 10:00 AM,** local time. Submissions, in PDF, must also be emailed to the addresses as noted in the RFP. Late submissions and conditional proposals will not be considered.

A Proposal Guarantee of fifteen (15%) percent of the total proposal price must accompany the proposals. The security deposit may be in cash, certified check, cashier's check, or proposal bond executed by a surety company holding a certificate of authority from the United States Secretary of Treasury as an acceptable surety. *A Payment Bond of one hundred (100%) percent and a Performance Bond* of one hundred (100%) percent of the total bid price will be required upon the execution of the contract by the successful Proposer. The Payment and Performance bond must be executed by a surety company holding a certificate of authority from the United States Secretary of Treasury as an acceptable surety. Surety Company must be authorized to do business in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, for the protection of all persons supplying

labor and material to the contractor or its subcontractors for the performance of the work provided for in the contract.

All insurers' questions, concerns and qualification shall be handled by the Department of Commerce Office of the Insurance Commissioner (OIC). The OIC is tasked with regulating and monitoring compliance to the CNMI's Insurance Code (Title 4, Division 7). *Proposers are required to submit a clearance from the OIC certifying their insurer of choice is in compliance with the CNMI's Insurance Code.*

Proponents are advised that CUC assumes no responsibility in any act of omission on the part of the proponents due to lack of information or understanding of the proposal requirements in the course of proponents' preparation of a proposal or supply under the contract.

Proponents shall be accorded fair and equal treatment. There shall be no disclosure of any information derived from proposals submitted by competing proponents.

This Request for Proposal does not commit CUC to the award of a contract or contracts, nor to pay any cost incurred in the preparation and submission of proposals in anticipation of a contract. This request and the ensuing contract shall be executed pursuant to the CUC Procurement Regulations.

All responses to this RFP should take into account any and all taxes, including excise tax, which will become the obligation of the proponent awarded a contract. Successful proponents will be required to submit a copy of a valid CNMI Business license in compliance with the Contractor's Registration and Licensing Laws of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, upon award of the contract. The Contractor and all subcontractors will be obligated to pay wage rates not less than the current CNMI minimum wage, prevailing through the period of contract, as indicated in the web page: https://marianaslabor.net/. The proponents shall be required to comply with all applicable CNMI and Federal Laws.

All questions regarding this project must be submitted in writing no later than 10:00 a.m. local time on **December 21, 2015,** to Manny B. Sablan, CUC Purchasing Officer, CUC P.O. Box 501220, Saipan, MP 96950 via email: manny.sablan@cucgov.org and Marcela Tenorio, Administrative Assistant, Procurement Division via email: marcela.tenorio@cucgov.org CUC will respond to any questions and clarifications only to prospective proposers who have registered for the solicitation with CUC procurement division.

CUC reserves the right to reject any or all proposals and waive any imperfection in the Request for Bid in the interest of the Corporation. All proposals shall become the property of CUC.

JOHN RIEGEL
Acting Executive Director

MANNY B. SABLAN
Purchasing Officer

Ongoing recruitment for upcoming Rotaract year

By DAISY DEMAPAN
daisy_demapan@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

The Rotaract Club of Saipan closed out their final meeting of the year yesterday, citing ongoing recruiting efforts for "committed individuals dedicated to service above self."

Rotaract president Del Mendiola said in terms of recruitment, "we're always looking to expand the club but we want to diversify our members to maximize the fellowship and professional development capacity of Rotary."

This coming year, she said, the club wants to carry out more service related activities despite setbacks in club membership.

She noted service activities during Typhoon Soudelor, including food and water distribution, but added that more needs to be done.

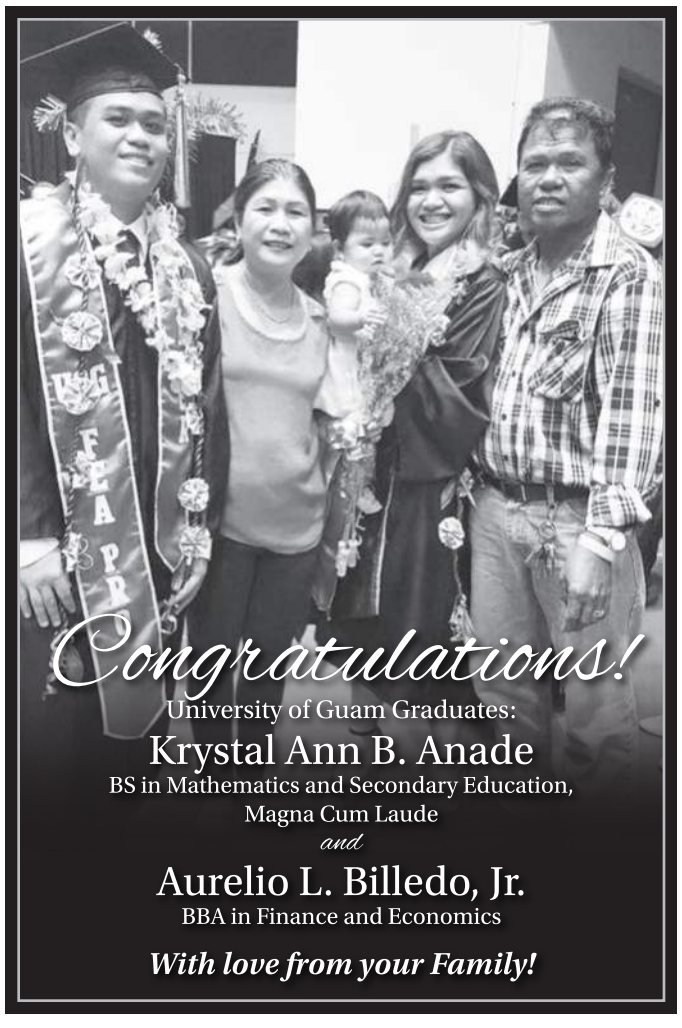
"We're still looking for members looking to commit to international service, which goes beyond community service. This March we'll be attending the Asia Pacific Regional Rotaract four-day conference in Kyoto, Japan, to discuss issues pertinent to our region and how other clubs can work together in service projects directed toward a chosen cause," she said.

The trip will be sponsored by the Rotary Club of Saipan.

"It'll be our first time attending the conference so we'll be partnering with the Rotaract Club of the Marianas from Guam for a cultural performance," adding that the club will be showcasing Chamorro food and dances.

Rotaract brings together people ages 18 to 30 in universities and communities worldwide to organize service activities, develop leadership and professional skills, and have fun. Rotary clubs sponsor them, but Rotaract members manage and fund their clubs independently. Rotaract members work closely with their local Rotary club, and may join after their Rotaract membership ends.

For any committed individuals between the ages of 18 through 30 looking to be active in community service projects, contact Suzanne at sankojetnil@gmail.com or Mendiola at deleloisemendiola@gmail.com.



Laolao Bay sediment chambers cleared out

By DAISY DEMAPAN
daisy_demapan@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

The Bureau of Environmental and Coastal Quality's Division of Coastal Resources Management partner up with Micronesia Islands Nature Alliance's Tasi Watch rangers, the Saipan Mayor's Office, and the Department of Public Works to remove sediment from the sediment chambers at Laolao Bay.
CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Last Thursday, the Bureau of Environmental and Coastal Quality's Division of Coastal Resources Management partnered with the Micronesia Islands Nature Alliance's Tasi Watch rangers, the Saipan Mayor's Office, and the Department of Public Works to clean the sediment chambers near Laolao Bay.

According to Jihan Buniag, coral reef initiative education and outreach coordinator, the teams were able to remove a total of six cubic yards of sediment.

In a statement, Buniag noted that natural and anthropogenic activities such as littering, air and water pollution, pesticide use, construction, sewage, or natural debris can enter coastal ecosystems through runoff.

This sedimentation, Buniag said, has harmful effects capable of smothering the reef, preventing new growth and can ultimately lead to coral death and loss of habitat for fish.

Coastal ecosystems provide many important benefits, Buniag said, and protecting the coral reef is vital to island life.

As the division tries to address issues affecting the ocean and near-shore areas, Buniag said that everyone must consider and take responsibility for what is happening on land.

The BECQ has been engaged in regular cleanups of these chambers to ensure they fully function, catching sediment and preventing sediment from entering the reef.

If you'd like to make a difference and protect the CNMI's natural resources both on land and in the sea, BECQ invites the community to incorporate sustainable practices to prevent erosion and reduce land-based pollution and incorporate new, ecosystem saving habits as resolutions for the New Year ahead.

For more information on coastal resource management activities, call CRM at 664-8513.

Judge 'extremely satisfied' with Tang's performance

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
ferdie_delatorre@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

» Tydingco-Gatewood OKs trustee's payment of $15,425 compensation for 2 months

U.S. District Court for the NMI designated judge Frances Tydingco-Gatewood has ordered the Settlement Fund to pay its trustee, Joyce C. H. Tang, $13,948.07 in compensation and reimbursement for expenses incurred in August and September 2015.

Tydingco-Gatewood said she has reviewed the invoices and finds Tang's request for compensation and reimbursement to be reasonable. The judge said she is satisfied with Tang's performance during this time frame.

The $13,948.07 represents 90 percent of the professional fees and 100 percent of all expenses incurred in August and September 2015.

In a separate order last week, Tydingco-Gatewood also ordered the Settlement Fund to pay Tang from the funds being held in trust the sum of $11,276.20 for the period from November 2014 through July 2015.

Tydingco-Gatewood said she is extremely satisfied with the work performed by the trustee and noted that none of the parties in the case have objected to Tang's compensation requests.

On trustee's invoices for August and September 2015, the judge approved Tang's request for payment of $7,888.88 in professional services and expenses for August and September 2015 respectively, for a total of $15,425.20.

Tydingco-Gatewood further ordered the Settlement Fund to hold in trust to the credit of the trustee the $1,477.13, which represents 10 percent of the trustee's professional fees for this time period.

The trustee may petition for release of the 10 percent retainage on a quarterly basis, subject to the court's satisfaction of Tang's work and any objections to the trustee's compensation requests.

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Opinion

Hafa Adai!
Saipan Tribune
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The Associated Press | Pacific Islands News Association

EDITORIAL

The best argument against Obamacare just got weaker

Politics aside, the success of Obamacare has always depended mainly on economics: If it can't attract the right mix of customers, the program is doomed. On this score, the latest figures from the Department of Health and Human Services are encouraging, even if it's too soon to declare victory.

More young people—who on average are in good health, and who help defray the cost of insuring the sick—are enrolling in Obamacare. Almost 1 million new customers age 34 or younger had signed up for coverage starting Jan. 1, 2016, an increase of almost 50 percent compared with the same period last year. That age group made up 41 percent of first-time enrollees, up from 38 percent year ago.

But the department also announced Tuesday that 8.3 million people in total are enrolled for coverage in 2016 on the 38 state exchanges operated by the federal government, almost 2 million more than at the same point last year. Given that the Congressional Budget Office initially projected that 21 million people would be enrolled by this point, it's hard to say the program is going according to plan.

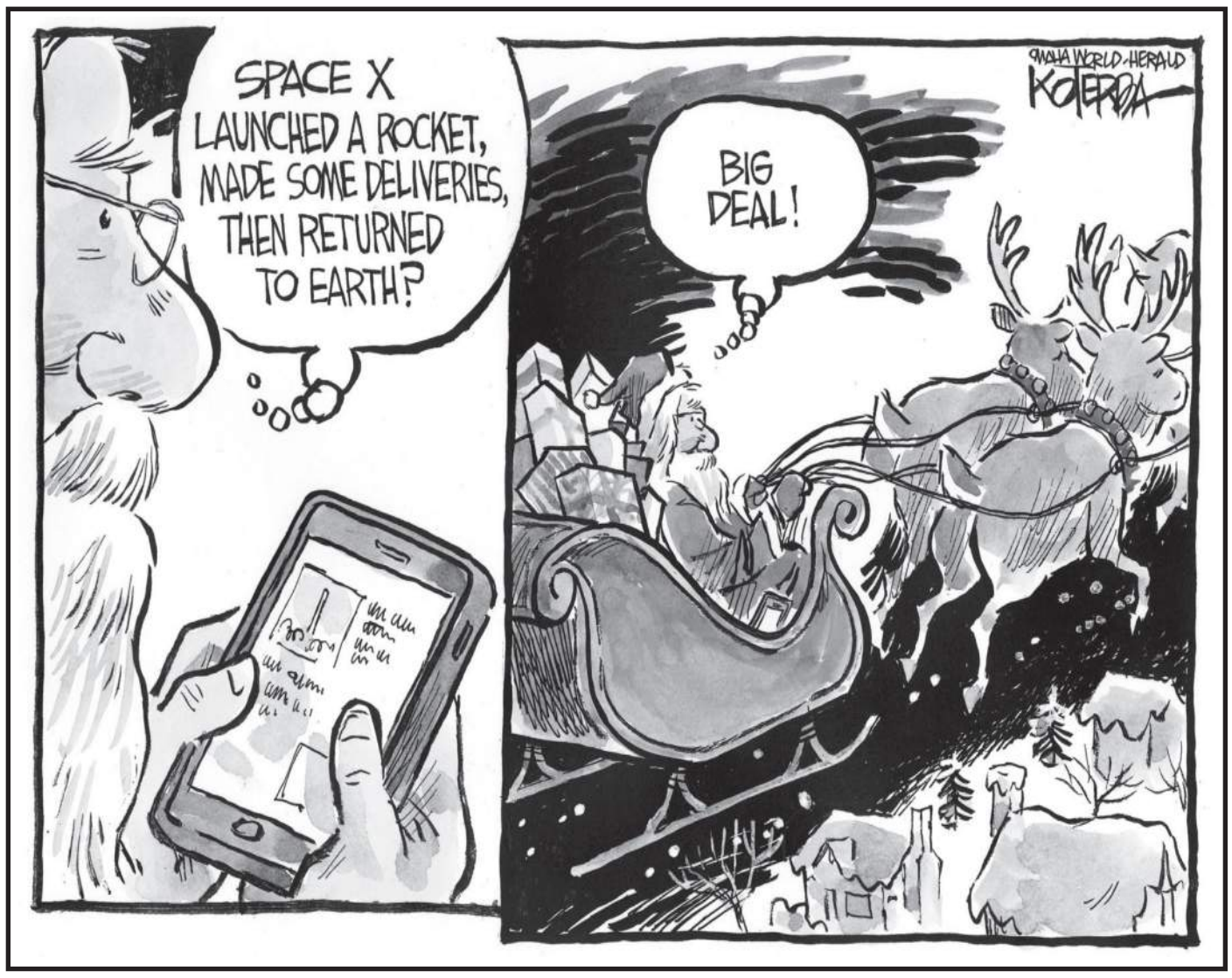
Nonetheless, getting more young people to sign up is crucial. Youth is a proxy for cost: Because people in their 20s and early 30s generally use fewer medical services than those who are older, their participation helps keep per-person expenses—and, by extension, premiums—down.

True, the failure to sign up young people wouldn't by itself cause Obamacare to fail. The program partially reimburses insurers that lose money on the exchanges, and federal subsidies help defray the cost of higher consumer premiums. But a failure to attract young, healthy customers would make Obamacare more expensive to taxpayers.

It's not clear what's driving young people to sign up in greater numbers. One incentive is probably that the penalty for being uninsured will increase next year to at least $695. Or maybe they're realizing that coverage isn't as expensive as they thought. At any rate, this development diminishes the danger that state exchanges will collapse under the weight of lopsided risk pools, rising premiums and declining consumer demand.

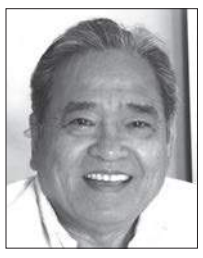
In any case, the White House can't afford to get complacent about Obamacare. The trend of rising copayments, deductibles and other out-of-pocket payments remains a concern with exchange coverage. But the most lethal threat to the viability of reform—a dearth of youngsters with any interest in health insurance—appears to be subsiding.

(c)2015 Bloomberg News



Vicky of our innocence

By JAIME VERGARA
Special to the Saipan Tribune



Jaime Vergara previously taught at SVES in the CNMI. A peripatetic pedagogue, he last taught in China but makes Honolulu, Shenyang, and Saipan home. He can be reached at pinoypanda2031@aol.com. All views expressed by the author are his/her own and do not necessarily reflect the opinion and stance of the Saipan Tribune.

She was not that innocent but she was wide awake. Vicky asked her two sons, one in Australia and another in Florida, to come home. Two weeks later, 70ish, she concluded her earthly journey. She was intentional in the significance of closure and the symbology of completion.

I never really met Vicky but I've crossed paths with her four sons and daughter(s). Her former husband is a good friend whose personal journey itself and the way he lives his ethnic identity is a wonder of major proportions.

But I remember Vicky today being Innocents' Day in the Christian liturgical calendar. In the nativity account in the Gospel according to Matthew, King Herod felt betrayed by the three kings who first sought his assistance but did not bother to bid him adieu so he ordered the blanket massacre of all the boys under 2. This was used in the narrative to fulfill a passage out of Jeremiah of the Old Testament, but veracity and authority of Scripture is not our search. The human rather than the literal historicity of the story is our concern.

It was our pleasure dealing with high school minds two weeks before Christmas, and in the discourse on self-image that we dealt with in civics and U.S. history, language arts and reading, it was inevitable that we touched on the historical symbols of religion that retained faithfulness to the authentic and the real.

We touched on the great unifying symbol of the Hindu *Om* that insists on the unity of all things, never mind that the 330 million personae of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva seem to defy congruence. Then we touched on the reality of two opposite forces like the *yin-yang* continually seeking the point of balance instead of cancelling each other out. Sinosphere is blessed with this perspective, much to the consternation of Europe that wants to finish off a conflict when one is defeated, even unto death.

Closer to home, the word YHWH means "the way life is" and any attempt to live before an imagined reality is quickly burst as an illusion, a mirage in the desert. Only the real counts. The true wailers on the wall of Jerusalem are not those who long for a King of David to save them from their predicament but for a Messiah that allows them the integrity of their tears when life in the desert becomes unbearable.

The Christian insight is the propensity to keep building illusions, creating "castles in the sky," quite literally bringing the Rah of the sun pyramids of Egypt into the transcendent heaven of Mt. Olympus of Zeus, a place we can go to after enduring the vale of tears that earthly life provides.

The Christ-word is toward the truth and the nativity story tells of how the three kings did not trust Herod and returned to their homes without pandering to a lie. To "die to our illusion is to gain real life" was the Christ-word witness of the *ekklesia,* the "household of the Way Life Is" that got ritualized in the celebration at Christmas time. There is no escape, "even unto death," and to demythologize such endearing terms like "incarnate, crucified and resurrected" is to take down Christo Rei from heavenly glory surrounded by the winged angelic voices and deal with what is real.

To be incarnate is to understand one's self as unique, one of a kind, unrepeatable of which "there has not been one like me before and there will never be another one like me ever again"—not an object of profound theology as it is an item of common sense. If out of the 200 million sperms my dad unleashed to fertilize my mom's egg and I was the one that made it, it is from awesome and incredible odds. Of the sperms that swarm around the egg, the first arrivals do not necessary get into the ovum. The egg chooses and I was chosen to be the one to merge with an ovum to create an embryo; I see myself as a chosen one!

What is true of me is true of everyone else. We are the winners in the great lottery of existence, and free to decide how to live our finitude.

With the human propensity to build delusions, castles in the sky, I die to my illusions; a dying sometimes not out of choice but forced by life's reality itself, just the way it is. Shelving the drama of Golgotha, each human, to be ordinary, is crucified to delusions, and awakened to the coda that to "die is to live." The crucifixion becomes a part of my incarnation, and results in an incredible new affirmation: I can live! Resurrection is the fancy word given.

The 18th was carnival day and Christmas pageantry at the high school where I taught. Students sold water balloons for the high energy "fights." With the screams in the courtyard, the "innocent" students were hardly that.

There will always be those who will try to erase this "innocence" to wallow in what should be, ought to be and imagined to be. *To be or not to be, that is the question* is Hamlet's soliloquy.

A colleague found out a truth of being just the way one is; found it difficult to digest. Vicky of our innocence is *Visitacion* by baptism. Consider yourself visited. Just be!

EDITORIAL POLICY Letters to the editor must include the NAME, VILLAGE ADDRESS, and CONTACT NUMBER of the contributor. Letters that do not have these information will immediately be trashed. Contributions consisting of 500 words or less have more chances of getting published. The *Saipan Tribune* reserves the right to publish a contribution or not; the right to edit submissions for length, accuracy, and clarity; and the right to publish and distribute contributions in print, electronic, or other media formats. Submissions may be sent via snail mail to the 2nd Floor, JP Center, Beach Road, Garapan, Saipan, 96950; fax (670) 235-3740; e-mail to editor@saipantribune.com; or through our website at www.saipantribune.com.

Rice

By ED STEPHENS
Special to the Saipan Tribune

Visit Ed Stephens Jr. at EdStephensJr.com. All views expressed by the author are his/her own and do not necessarily reflect the opinion and stance of the Saipan Tribune.

One of my minor goals for 2016 is to learn more about rice. That's right: rice. I eat it all the time but I don't know anything about it.

I have pal who is an agricultural economist and he asks how I can remain so concertedly ignorant about so many important topics. Well, it's easy, really; all it takes is a little practice.

For example, how rice gets from soil to plate is a mystery to me. Every time I try to read up on it I get lost in a thicket of biology terms. Descriptions of the post-harvest processing don't shed any light on things either. Until I get to see the relevant steps with my own eyes I guess I'll have no idea how any of this works.

Rice is part of daily life on Saipan, of course, but that's not a universal situation. For example, there are large areas of the mainland where it's pretty much invisible. When I was growing up my family would have it once or twice a year because it's an element of some old Southern recipes, but, outside of that, I rarely, if ever, saw it.

The first time I was exposed to rice on a daily basis was when I worked aboard merchant ships in the tropical Pacific. Various ships pulled their crews from various regions: Asia, South America, Central America, Eastern Europe, and Western Europe. Americans were rare. Rice wasn't. It was served at every meal.

It wasn't always served in the same way, though. I spent some time on one ship where the crew had such rotten teeth that the rice was cooled to room temperature with ice cubes before it was served. On that same ship, incidentally, prime rib would be ground into a paste so it could be gummed down, also at room temperature, by the crew.

As a commodity, rice isn't as glittery as gold, silver, or even oil, so you don't often hear about it in the general financial news. Rice has so many varieties that, unlike, say, gold, it can't all be traded as one broad category. The broadest category I'm aware of is "rough rice," which trades in contracts of 2,000 hundredweight, which, for the rest of us, means 200,000 pounds.

I've never traded rice, nor even looked into it, and every commodity has its own weird way of pricing things out. If I'm reading the quotes correctly, it looks like rough rice is trading at about 11 cents per pound.

Given that rice takes a lot of land and labor to grow, I've got no idea how farmers fare when they're getting pennies per pound for their output. Maybe I'm missing something here.

Or maybe not. I took a look at prices for Thai "Grade B" rice, quoted as FOB Bangkok, and it was $369 per ton earlier in December. So that's about 18 cents per pound. Thailand premium jasmine rice was about twice as much, at $728 a ton, or 36 cents per pound. Complicated business, this. Anyway, the wide variety of rices drives a wide range of prices.

The Japanese addressed the price dynamics a long time ago, and in the 17th century established the world's first futures market in order to trade rice contracts.

Buying rice is one thing, but cooking it also entails costs. I used to be oblivious to fact that there was any such thing as a "rice cooker," but now I know that the round appliance on the kitchen counter carries a Zojirushi label and a $400 price tag. Among Zojirushi aficionados, which would be just about everyone I know these days, the made-in-Japan models command a dear premium.

On the simpler end of the spectrum, my wife remembers cooking rice over firewood when she was growing up. She told me that the cost or even mere availability of fuel (wood, propane, electricity, etc.) is a big deal in some places. Once cooked, there is then the matter of keeping it warm, so this preparation thing is no small element of life.

The country that grows the most rice, by far, is China. India grows the second most. Nobody else comes close to these two, though the list of nations that grow rice is surprisingly long.

I've got rice on my mind today because we're traveling for the holidays and haven't seen so much as a grain of rice since we left home. So, while I don't know how it grows, I do know that it grew on me, so to speak, and I'm looking forward to the next time I can lay eyes on something that used to be invisible to me.

5 things to look forward to (hopefully) in 2016

By HAIDEE V. EUGENIO
Special to the Saipan Tribune

Haidee V. Eugenio is a veteran journalist in the CNMI. All views expressed by the author are his/her own and do not necessarily reflect the opinion and stance of the Saipan Tribune.

As 2015 comes to an end—a year that saw a devastating typhoon that tested peoples' resilience and humanity, an islandwide Internet outage, the conviction of a former governor who's also the first in CNMI history to be impeached by the House of Representatives, unsolved disappearances and murders, and the opening of what's supposed to be a "temporary" casino on Saipan—we look forward to 2016 with renewed hope.

Who doesn't want peace on earth, health and happiness, prosperity, disaster-free island…and someone to promise that self-serving, clueless politicians will be voted out, never to return to any commission, board or other appointed posts after losing in the election?

But perhaps we need to be a bit more realistic with our 2016 wish list.

Wouldn't it be nice if these were to happen?

1. Employers start applying for H1-B or H2-B visas for their qualified long-term and new nonresident workers instead of relying on—and waiting for an extension beyond 2019—of the CW permit system. At the same time, all willing and able U.S. workers join the labor force.

Politicians and investors are touting the expansion of the local tourism economy, thanks, they say, to exclusive Saipan casino license holder Best Sunshine. This, they say, only means there will be more jobs. This, while the U.S. workers' pool remains limited, and the nonresident CW program's cap is supposed to decrease every year until it reaches zero when it expires in 2019, unless extended anew.

2. That exclusive Saipan casino license holder Best Sunshine will be able to deliver, among other things, the promised completion of its $500-million, 14-story beachside casino hotel by late 2016.

It won't be surprising if Best Sunshine asks for an extension for the first phase construction completion. After all, it was already able to get the 2014 casino license agreement amended for Best Sunshine to set up a "live training facility" or supposedly temporary casino on the ground floor of duty-free giant T Galleria in Garapan, as well as amendments to the Saipan casino law to accommodate its needs and wants. The original agreement didn't contain a provision on a temporary casino, one that's not built from the ground up.

This temporary casino is supposedly for use only until the completion and operation of the $500-million Grand Mariana Casino and Hotel Resort, now undergoing construction, in Garapan.

As pointed out by Rep. Ray Tebuteb (Ind-Saipan), will the government be able to facilitate the development of a sewer pipeline, for example, and other infrastructure such as roads needed for such a major hotel construction and completion in less than a year? Saipan can't even ensure that power at its airport is always on, with or without a typhoon.

The Grand Mariana is envisioned to include beachfront villas, pools and two casino floors. The total gross floor area is 1.22 million square feet. And Grand Mariana is only Phase 1 of Best Sunshine's promised $7.1-billion integrated casino resort on Saipan, with the second phase eyed in the northern part of the island, most likely at the current location of Mariana Resort & Spa in Marpi.

3. That the Department of Public Lands will be able to complete a much-needed revised land use plan for Saipan, one that the real owners of these public lands can review and serve as guide for the allocation and reallocation of limited resources.

Just two years ago, the Inos administration through DPL called on investors to seek private lands first before eyeing public lands for their proposed projects, be it a casino resort or a new hotel. It would be interesting to find out the amount of public lands that has since been leased to investors since that call.

4. That the CNMI's public officials do not put all their eggs in one basket, that they do not rely exclusively on Best Sunshine to grow the economy and cure all the islands' financial woes.

While casino is an interesting way to expand a tourism economy, it certainly is not the only one that has the potential to improve peoples' wellbeing, public health services, education, utilities and infrastructure. There are others that can complement the existing tourism industry, such as allowing the U.S. military to use certain portions of the CNMI for training.

The CNMI certainly doesn't want to get caught off-guard if and when the U.S. government decides to end the U.S. visa waiver for Chinese, as well as Russian tourists, bound for the Commonwealth and therefore kill the Saipan casino industry well before it booms.

After all, even with all the hoopla about Best Sunshine and the Saipan casino industry taking care of all retirees, there is still a projected shortfall in the amount of pension that Saipan retirees need in 2016 and beyond.

5. That voters will be smarter in choosing the individuals to represent their interests and the greater interests of the CNMI during the November 2016 midterm elections.

Voters should be able to vote on the basis of issues that candidates are willing and able to tackle, the platforms they stand on, and their track record, and not on family ties; that they won't be bought off by candidates and special interests.

Current members of the House and Senate do not have difficulty passing a casino legalization bill within 48 hours in both chambers or raising their allowances, yet they take their time passing measures to improve public health services and pay the government's mounting utility debts, for example.

Wouldn't it be nice if an agency actually investigates whether the CNMI's elected officials and other employees received and continue to receive bribes from investors in exchange for legislation such as legalizing casino on Saipan and the speedy processing of investment-related applications, among other things?

Here's to 2016!

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

'We're just doing our job'

We live in a world where we constantly search for the littlest of faults in everything. It's the hamartia of humanity. But it is deeply saddening how we talk about altruism, especially this holiday season, whilst looking for ways to one up each other.

Moving closer to the issue here on island, I know many people do not agree on the passing of the casino bill. It is evident in the several articles and opinion published in the media. But what's done is done and the least we can do is turn it to our advantage. Whether we like it or not Best Sunshine has had and will continue to attract tourists from all over the world to visit our little paradise, bringing a boom not only to our tourism industry, but the job market as well.

I am neither a politician nor an activist, I am simply voicing out my opinion out of frustration from the many backlash that has been thrown their way. What happened the other night, Christmas Day, was the last straw. I came in with a group of friends to check out the casino. We were a group of nurses, teachers, and accountants. Out of our uniforms, we were seen as kids trying to sneak into a "21-and-over-place." We got ID'd at the entrance like everyone else. What came as a surprise was how four of my friends were trailed by security personnel who said their establishment has been reported for letting underage people in and they simply wanted to prove that they in fact checked our ID's. They had to make a copy of each one as proof. We understood that they were just doing their job. Later that night, I found out it was not the players nor the bystanders, nor the casino employees who reported the incident. Unsurprisingly, it was the commissioners who work for the government. People who are "just doing their job" as well. And what job is it they do exactly, you ask? It's their job to protect the islands from big companies like Best Sunshine. It's their job to work from the inside and search for loopholes just to prove a point—that business is not welcome here.

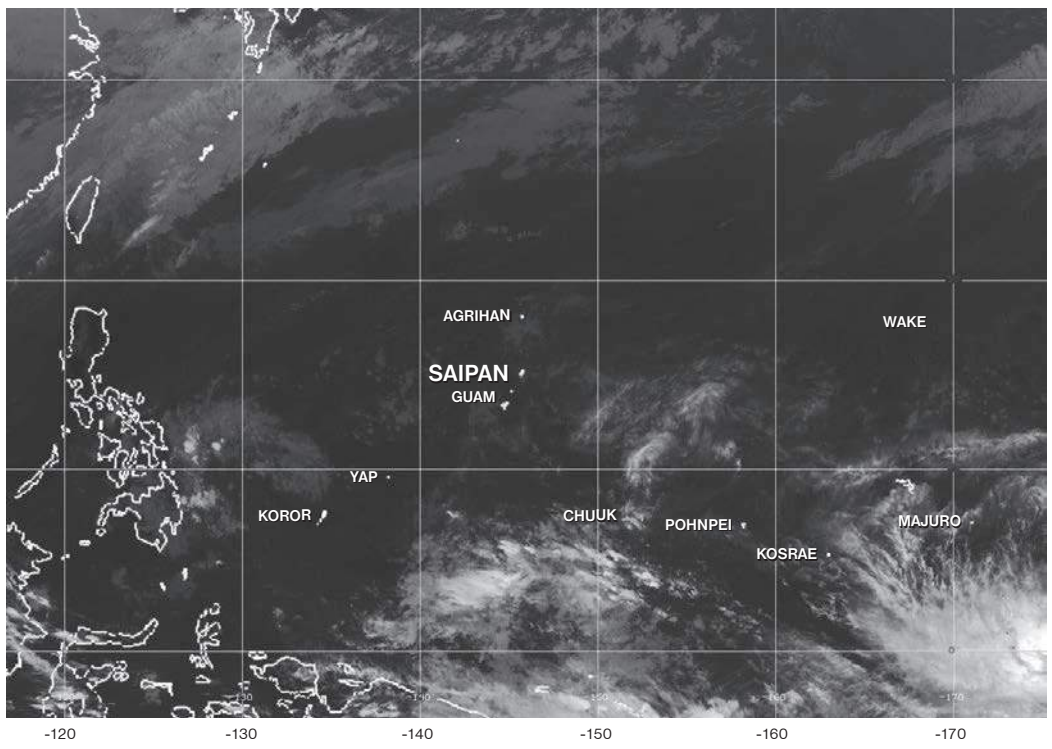
Rai Tabunda
San Roque, Saipan

The Weather

5-Day Forecast for Saipan and Tinian

TODAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
Partly cloudy with isolated showers. East winds 15 to 20 mph.	Partly cloudy with isolated showers. East winds 15 to 20 mph.	Partly cloudy with isolated showers.	Partly cloudy with isolated showers.	Partly cloudy with isolated showers.
▲86° ▼75°	▲87° ▼76°	▲87° ▼76°	▲87° ▼76°	▲87° ▼76°

Yesterday's Satellite Image



PICTURE TIME: 1:00PM, SUNDAY, DECEMBER 27, 2015
Western North Pacific between equator and 25N from 130E to 180.

A cold front runs southwestward from near Iwo To island through 25N143E to beyond 130E at 21N. Scattered showers are seen near this feature within 75 miles of a line from 22N130E to 25N140E. A trade-wind disturbance is causing scattered showers north of Koror within 100 miles of a line from 13N130E to 10N136E. A near-equatorial trough extends eastward from south of Mindanao through 2N130E to a circulation centered southeast of Tarawa at EQ176E. Scattered showers and a few thunderstorms are present near the trough southwest of Chuuk within 90 miles of a line from 1N140E to 4N149E to EQ151E. Scattered showers and isolated thunderstorms are found near the circulation over Tarawa south of a line from 2N169E to 6N180.

Satellite image and accompanying information are provided by the National Weather Service. For an updated weather forecast, visit the National Weather Service Guam homepage: www.prh.noaa.gov/guam/

Micronesia

Guam And Rota	Showers	▲85	▼79
Palau	Partly Cloudy	▲88	▼78
Yap	Partly Cloudy	▲85	▼77
Chuuk	Thunderstorms	▲86	▼80
Pohnpei	Showers	▲88	▼79
Kosrae	Partly Cloudy	▲85	▼79
Majuro	Partly Cloudy	▲84	▼80

Around the Globe

Auckland	Mostly Sunny	▲78	▼61
Beijing	Sunny	▲37	▼21
Hong Kong	Partly Cloudy	▲68	▼60
Honolulu	Partly Cloudy	▲83	▼72
London	Partly Cloudy	▲55	▼50
Los Angeles	Sunny	▲62	▼39
Manila	Sunny	▲88	▼70
Melbourne	Partly Cloudy	▲74	▼53
Miami	Partly Cloudy	▲82	▼75
New York	Mostly Cloudy	▲44	▼36
Osaka	Partly Cloudy	▲50	▼39
Paris	Partly Cloudy	▲54	▼49
Pusan	Sunny	▲44	▼29
Rome	Sunny	▲61	▼39
Salem	Rain	▲40	▼35
San Francisco	Cloudy	▲53	▼42
Seoul	Sunny	▲34	▼21
Tokyo	Partly Cloudy	▲46	▼35
Washington, DC	Cloudy	▲47	▼41

NMI CRIME STOPPERS
Anonymous tips can now be submitted through the following:
- Call 234-7272 (PARA) on any telephone
- *11 on any IT&E cellular phone
- Log on to the internet at www.nmicrimestoppers.com

Tides

Saipan Harbor

3:29 AM	Today	Low Tide:	-0.4 Feet
10:25 AM	Today	High Tide:	2.0 Feet
4:10 PM	Today	Low Tide:	1.1 Feet
8:52 PM	Today	High Tide:	1.8 Feet

Sunrise/Sunset

Today	6:41 AM	5:55 PM
Tuesday	6:42 AM	5:56 PM
Wednesday	6:42 AM	5:56 PM
Thursday	6:42 AM	5:57 PM
Friday	6:43 AM	5:57 PM

Moonrise/Moonset

Today	8:34 PM	8:41 AM
Tuesday	9:25 PM	9:27 AM
Wednesday	10:15 PM	10:09 AM
Thursday	11:03 PM	10:50 AM
Friday	11:50 PM	11:28 AM

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FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF DECEMBER 4, 2015

DEPARTURES

SAIPAN-GUAM (GUM)

UA2924	4:15am	5:05am	Daily
UA2922	8:40am	9:30am	Daily
UA2921	1:30pm	3:10pm	1, 4, 5, 7 via Rota
UA2920	2:20pm	3:10pm	2, 3, 6
UA2928	6:05pm	6:55pm	Daily
UA2926	9:50pm	10:40pm	Daily

SAIPAN-ROTA (ROP)

UA2921	1:30pm	2:05pm	1, 4, 5, 7

ROTA (ROP)-GUAM (GUM)

UA2921	2:35pm	3:10pm	1, 4, 5, 7

SAIPAN-NARITA (NRT)

DL297	4:20pm	7:10pm	Daily

SAIPAN-SEOUL (ICN)

OZ626	2:10am	6:00am	1
OZ626	2:50am	6:40am	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
OZ628	3:50am	7:40am	Daily
7C3403	4:35am	8:30am	Daily
7C3401	4:30pm	8:25pm	Daily

SAIPAN-BUSAN (PUS)

OZ608	3:10am	6:20am	4, 7

SAIPAN-SHANGHAI (PVG)

3U8648	6:10am	8:40am	1, 4, 5, 7

SAIPAN-BEIJING (PEK)

MU764	1:30am	5:30am	3, 5, 7

SAIPAN-GUANGZHOU (CAN)

3U8646	4:20am	7:30am	2, 6

SAIPAN-MANILA (MNL)

OZ626/701	2:10am	11:15am	1 via ICN
OZ626/701	2:50am	11:15am	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 via ICN
UA2924/191	4:15am	9:00am	3, 6 via GUM
UA2924/PR111	4:15am	9:20am	1, 2, 4, 6, 7 via GUM
UA2924/183	4:15am	9:30pm	2, 5 via GUM
UA2924/183	4:15am	9:50pm	1, 3, 4, 6, 7 via GUM
UA2922/183	8:40am	9:30pm	2, 5 via GUM
UA2922/183	8:40am	9:50pm	1, 3, 4, 6, 7 via GUM
UA2921/183	1:30pm	9:30pm	5 via Rota-GUM
UA2921/183	1:30pm	9:50pm	1, 4, 7 via Rota-GUM
UA5038/183	2:20pm	9:30pm	2 via GUM
UA5038/183	2:20pm	9:50pm	3, 6 via GUM
UA5072/191	9:50pm	7:20am+1	1, 6 via GUM

SAIPAN-HONG KONG (HKG)

OZ626/721	2:10am	11:50am	1 via ICN
OZ626/721	2:50am	11:50am	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 via ICN
OZ628/721	3:50am	12:50am	Daily via ICN
UA2924/159	4:15am	10:35pm	1, 3, 5, 6 via GUM
UA2922/159	8:40am	10:35pm	1, 3, 5, 6 via GUM
UA2921/159	1:30pm	10:35pm	1, 5 via Rota-GUM
UA2920/159	2:20pm	10:35pm	3, 6 via GUM

ARRIVALS

GUAM (GUM)-SAIPAN

UA2923	2:45am	3:35am	Daily
UA2925	7:15am	8:05am	Daily
UA2921	12:10pm	1:00pm	1, 4, 5, 7
UA2920	12:10pm	1:50pm	2, 3, 6 via Rota
UA2927	4:45pm	5:35pm	Daily
UA2929	8:30pm	9:20pm	Daily

GUAM (GUM)-ROTA (ROP)

UA2920	12:10pm	12:45pm	2, 3, 6

ROTA (ROP)-SAIPAN

UA2920	1:15pm	1:50pm	2, 3, 6

NARITA (NRT)-SAIPAN

DL298	10:35am	3:10pm	Daily

SEOUL (ICN)-SAIPAN

7C3402	10:10am	3:30pm	Daily
OZ625	7:40pm	1:00am+1	7
OZ625	8:20pm	1:40am+1	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
OZ627	9:30pm	2:50am+1	Daily
7C3404	10:10pm	3:30am+1	Daily

BUSAN (PUS)-SAIPAN

OZ607	9:00pm	1:50am+1	3, 6

SHANGHAI (PVG)-SAIPAN

3U8647	10:40pm	5:00am+1	3, 4, 6, 7

BEIJING (PEK)-SAIPAN

MU763	4:30pm	12:30am+1	2, 4, 6

GUANGZHOU (CAN)-SAIPAN

3U8645	7:40pm	3:00am+1	1, 5

MANILA (MNL)-SAIPAN

UA190/2929	9:55am	9:20pm	2, 6, 7 via GUM
UA190/2929	10:00am	9:20pm	3 via GUM
OZ702/625	12:30pm	1:00am+1	7 via ICN
OZ702/625	12:30pm	1:40am+1	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 via ICN
OZ702/627	12:30pm	2:50am+1	Daily via ICN
PR110/UA2925	10:05pm	8:05am+1	1, 3, 5, 6, 7 via GUM
UA184/2925	10:55pm	8:05am+1	1, 3, 4, 6, 7 via GUM
UA184/2921	10:55pm	1:00pm+1	3, 4, 6, 7 via GUM
UA184/2920	10:55pm	1:50pm+1	1 via GUM-Rota
UA184/2927	10:55pm	5:35pm+1	1, 3, 4, 6, 7 via GUM
UA184/2929	10:55pm	9:20pm+1	1, 3, 4, 6, 7 via GUM

HONG KONG (HKG)-SAIPAN

OZ722/625	1:15pm	1:00am+1	7 via ICN
OZ722/625	1:15pm	1:40am+1	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 via ICN
OZ724/627	2:20pm	2:50am+1	Daily via ICN
UA116/2925	10:55pm	8:05am+1	1, 3, 5, 6 via GUM
UA116/2921	10:55pm	1:00pm+1	3, 6 via GUM
UA116/2920	10:55pm	1:50pm+1	1, 5 via GUM-Rota
UA116/2927	10:55pm	5:35pm+1	1, 3, 5, 6 via GUM
UA116/2929	10:55pm	9:20pm+1	1, 3, 5, 6 via GUM

LEGEND: Days: Monday (1), Tuesday (2), Wednesday (3), Thursday (4), Friday (5), Saturday (6) and Sunday (7); 3U: Sichuan Airlines; MU: China Eastern; UA: United Airlines; DL: Delta Airlines; OZ: Asiana; 7C: Jeju AirETD: Estimated Time of Departure; ETA: Estimated Time of Arrival. The Saipan Tribune is not responsible for any changes in the schedule.)

STAR MARIANAS AIR, INC.

TINIAN TO SAIPAN

DEPARTURE	ARRIVAL	FREQUENCY
6:30AM	6:45AM	Mon, Tue,Wed, Thu, Fri, Sat
7:30AM	7:45AM	Daily
8:30AM	8:45AM	Daily
9:30AM	9:45AM	Daily
10:30AM	10:45AM	Daily
11:30AM	11:45AM	Daily
12:30NN	12:45NN	Daily
1:30PM	1:45PM	Daily
2:30PM	2:45PM	Daily
3:30PM	3:45PM	Daily
4:30PM	4:45PM	Daily
5:30PM	5:45PM	Daily
6:30PM	6:45PM	Daily

SAIPAN TO TINIAN

DEPARTURE	ARRIVAL	FREQUENCY
7:00AM	7:15AM	Daily
8:00AM	8:15AM	Daily
9:00AM	9:15AM	Daily
10:00AM	10:15AM	Daily
11:00AM	11:15AM	Daily
12:00NN	12:15NN	Daily
1:00PM	1:15PM	Daily
2:00PM	2:15PM	Daily
3:00PM	3:15PM	Daily
4:00PM	4:15PM	Daily
5:00PM	5:15PM	Daily
6:00PM	6:15PM	Daily

SAIPAN TO ROTA

DEPARTURE	ARRIVAL	FREQUENCY
7:45AM	8:15AM	Mon, Tues,Wed, Thu, Fri, Sat
4:00PM	4:30PM	Mon, Tues,Wed, Thu, Fri, Sat

ROTA TO SAIPAN

DEPARTURE	ARRIVAL	FREQUENCY
8:30AM	9:00AM	Mon, Tues,Wed, Thu, Fri, Sat
4:45PM	5:15PM	Mon, Tues,Wed, Thu, Fri, Sat

Commonwealth Utilities Corporation

JOB VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

JVA No. **16-001**

Opening Date: **Friday, December 25, 2015**
Closing Date: **Thursday, January 07, 2016**

Trades Technician
(Diesel Power Plant Mechanic)

DUTIES: This class specification represents only the core areas of responsibilities; specific position assignments will vary depending on the needs of Power Generation. Primary duties are as a TRADES TECHNICIAN MECHANIC: Performs maintenance, operations, installations and/or repairs in assigned area of responsibility; provides technical guidance regarding assigned functions; and ensures quality service levels in accordance with proper procedures; Provide assistances in monitoring and complying with regulatory compliance; Operates specialized and heavy equipment; performs maintenance activities and skilled repairs to equipment, infrastructure and/or other items of assigned area of responsibility; Identifies issues and operational concerns; performs inspections; provides troubleshooting; evaluates corrective measures or options; recommends and implements solutions and corrective actions; Receives trouble calls; responds to requests and provides information or status updates. Initiates requests for the replenishment of materials and supplies; cleans, organizes and maintains work and supply areas; Analyzes readings of equipment; maintains records, logs, orders, data, and prepares reports; Perform reconditioning of used parts; Perform alignment of pumps and motors at auxiliary sites; Bending, cutting, grinding and fabricating various types of materials; Performs other duties of a similar nature and level as assigned.

LOCATION : Power Generation, Saipan, Northern Mariana Islands, USA.
(If needed, there may be periodic assignment to other divisions of CUC and/or other islands.)
SALARY : $20,826-$28,115 per annum.
POSITIONS : Three (3)
CONTRACT : Not Contracted.

MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS: Technical Education in diesel mechanics or related field desired, High School Diploma, General Education Diploma, or Adult Basic Education. Must demonstrate having had (A) 4 years of increasingly responsible experience performing mechanic duties on 1,500 HP or larger diesel prime mover engines and associated auxiliary units. Experience on Mitsubishi MAN, EMD, Cummins and/or Nordberg diesel engines desired but not required. Knowledge of: Mechanical principles, practices and procedures of assigned service area; Mathematical concepts; Inspection procedures; Safety procedures and safe work practices; Skill in: Performing skilled maintenance, operations and repair work of various plant systems; Operating specialized and heavy equipment; Monitoring equipment and making adjustments; Performing inspections and identifying issues; Troubleshooting issues and recommending or implementing solutions; Receiving requests and trouble calls and providing assistance; Initiating supply requests; Taking equipment readings and maintaining historical data; Utilizing communication and interpersonal skills as applied to interaction with coworkers, supervisor to sufficiently exchange or convey information and to receive work direction. Able to lift and carry heavy objects of 45 pounds and over, climb ladders, reach above the shoulders, stand, sit, crawl and kneel for prolonged periods and perform repeated bending. Recognize color codes, operate cranes and motor vehicles. Work primarily inside around machinery in operation; in varying degree of temperature in tight or cramped (confined) work spaces, at heights, on ladders or scaffolds, and on slippery or uneven walking surfaces in close proximity to high and low voltage circuits and climbs stairs frequently. Occasionally use solvents, de-greasing agents, or other chemical agents, and be assigned to protracted or irregular hours of work; exposed to dust, oil, grease, constant or excessive noise, vibration, and smoke and gas fumes. Work closely with others and/or alone depending on assigned daily activities.

Drop off your CUC Employment Application at the CUC Human Resource Office located on the 3rd Floor of the Joeten Dandan Building on Saipan. Otherwise, you may drop it off at the Tinian and Rota Administration Office.

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Commonwealth Utilities Corporation

JOB VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

JVA No. **16-002**

Opening Date: **Friday, December 25, 2015**
Closing Date: **Thursday, January 07, 2016**

Trades Assistant

Duties: Under the direct supervision of the Power Generation Manager or his/her designee. Assists with the safe and efficient operation of all plant equipment and machinery including, but not limited to, incinerators, generators, operation of valves, plant production operations, and unloading of diesel fuel tank trucks to storage tanks. -Primary duties are as a TRADES ASSISTANT OPERATOR: Follows all safety and operations procedures during operations and maintenance activities; Monitoring Plant systems as assigned; Prepares job site for work including gathering and setting up materials and supplies, and setting work safety barriers for protection; Gathers, cleans and returns equipment, materials and supplies used; Cleans and maintains work site after project or repair work is complete; Monitors equipment; takes readings and collects data; documents equipment readings; prepares and submits data and work reports; Performs inventory spot checks to ensure adequate materials and supplies are available for daily work activities; Assisting with equipment inspections, cleaning, corrosion control, and painting; Operating incinerators; oil and water separator pump, servicing and preparing oil filters; Maintaining grounds, trimming trees and removing debris and housekeeping; Performs other duties of a similar nature and level as assigned.

LOCATION : Power Generation, Saipan, Northern Mariana Islands, USA.
(If needed, there may be periodic assignment to other divisions of CUC and/or other islands.)
SALARY : $16,742.00 per annum.
CONTRACT : Not Contracted.
POSITION(S) : Ten (10)

Minimum Requirements: High School Diploma or GED or ABE Program AS. Training and knowledge in operations repair, and maintenance of power generating and/or industrial equipment/facilities desired but not required. Knowledge of: Customer service principles; Basic mathematical concepts; Safety procedures and safe work practices; Modern office technology. Skills in: Operating heavy and light equipment machinery, hand and power tools required of assigned area; Adhering to safety procedures and safe work practices; Prioritizing tasks and managing time for efficiency; Identifying issues and solving problems; Providing attention to detail; Taking equipment readings and recording data; Maintaining activity logs and reports; Utilizing a computer and relevant software applications; Utilizing communication and interpersonal skills as applied to interaction with coworkers, supervisor, the general public, and others to sufficiently exchange or convey information and to receive work direction. Must Able to lift and carry heavy objects of 45 pounds and over, climb ladders, reach above the shoulders, stand, sit, crawl and kneel for prolonged periods and perform repeated bending. Recognize color codes, operate cranes and motor vehicles. Work inside around machinery in operation; in varying degree of temperature in tight or cramped (confined) work spaces, at heights, on ladders or scaffolds, and on slippery or uneven walking surfaces in close proximity to high and low voltage circuits and climbs stairs frequently. Occasionally use solvents, de-greasing agents, or other chemical agents, and be assigned to protracted or irregular hours of work. Work in environments exposed to dust, oil, grease, constant or excessive noise, vibration, and smoke and gas fumes. Work closely with others and/or alone depending on assigned daily activities. Must be available to work a 24/7 rotation shift to include weekends and holidays, may be on call for emergency response. Applicants may be tested. Subject to pre-employment drug test.

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Commonwealth Utilities Corporation

JOB VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

JVA No. **16-003**

Opening Date: **Friday, December 25, 2015**
Closing Date: **Thursday, January 07, 2016**

Fiscal Technician, Senior

Duties: Under the direct supervision of the Chief Financial Officer or his/her designee. May provide lead direction and/or supervise staff to include: prioritizing and assigning work; conducting performance evaluations; ensuring staff is trained; ensuring that employees follow policies and procedures; maintaining a healthy and safe working environment; and, making hiring, termination, and disciplinary recommendations. Receives, reviews and verifies vendor invoices and statements; service reports; time sheets; payroll information; and/or other payable documentation; ensures completeness and accuracy of calculations and information. Determines general ledger account information or expense allocation information; processes accounts payable or payroll transactions; routes check payment or wire transfer information for approval; posts accounts upon approval. Researches and reviews account, billing or system information; prepares reconciliations of financial data; updates and maintains account or employee data; calculates and prepares financial adjustments or account charge information. Assists internal and external customers with inquiries or account information; receives complaints; researches issues; provides information and explains processes and procedures; recommends resolutions to issues. Retrieves, files and maintains records, documents and tracking spreadsheets; processes purchase orders; prepares reports, work orders and/or audit confirmations; compiles documents and drafts correspondence. May provide testimony related to customer account disputes. Performs other duties of a similar nature and level as assigned.

LOCATION : CFO Division, Saipan, Northern Mariana Islands, USA.
SALARY : $22,865.00 per annum to $30,867.00
CONTRACT : Not Contracted.
POSITION(S) : One (1)

Minimum Requirements: Associate's Degree in Accounting or directly related field and 3 years of fiscal support experience. Knowledge of: Applicable Federal, Commonwealth and local laws, codes, regulations and/or ordinances; Supervisory principles, practices and techniques (based on assignment); Customer service principles; Mathematical principles; Recordkeeping principles; Research methods; Modern office technology. Skills in: Interpreting and applying applicable laws, codes, regulations and standards; Supervising, monitoring, training and evaluating staff (based on assignment); Receiving, reviewing, posting and reconciling fiscal data or account information; Verifying fiscal data and updating account information; Responding to inquiries, researching information and resolving issues; Performing mathematical calculations and making corrections and adjustments; Researching and preparing account adjustments and related documentation; Preparing and maintaining files, forms, correspondence, reports and records; Updating, maintaining and preparing reports and spreadsheet tracking documents; Researching account information and providing information regarding billing disputes; Organizing and maintaining records management systems; Utilizing a computer and relevant software applications; Utilizing communication and interpersonal skills as applied to interaction with coworkers, supervisor, the general public, and others to sufficiently exchange or convey information and to receive work direction. Applicants may be tested. Subject to pre-employment drug test.

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Commonwealth Utilities Corporation

JOB VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

JVA No. **16-004**

Opening Date: **Friday, December 25, 2015**
Closing Date: **Thursday, January 07, 2016**

Fiscal Analyst

Duties: Under the direct supervision of the Chief Financial Officer or his/her designee. May lead or supervise staff to include: prioritizing and assigning work; conducting performance evaluations; ensuring staff is trained; ensuring that employees follow policies and procedures; maintaining a healthy and safe working environment; and, making hiring, termination, and disciplinary recommendations. Reviews, accounts for, and prepares various financial data such as: reconciling journal entries; accounts receivable aging; summary billing; accounting accruals; recording fixed asset costs or depreciation; calculating and posting payments, adjustments or allotments; and/or accounts payable invoice payments. May provide guidance, coordination and/or supervision of daily accounting activities. Monitors, reconciles and maintains general ledger accounts; prepares and posts journal entries during account closing periods. Performs analysis, verifies fiscal data, and prepares various management reports; provides inventory monitoring and status reports; reviews purchase order status, vendor statements, and performs quality checks for verification of services or materials received. Provides analytical support to internal and external customers and stakeholders; reviews documents and provides guidance in completion of forms; responds to inquiries or issues; researches and provides information on processes and procedures. Assists with annual audits by preparing schedules, reports and providing technical support. May provide supervision or coordination of physical inventory processes; reconciliation of inventory balances in preparation for financial reporting; and/or monitoring vehicle maintenance schedules and approving vehicle repairs and maintenance. Performs other duties of a similar nature and level as assigned.

LOCATION : CFO Division, Saipan, Northern Mariana Islands, USA.
SALARY : $37,756 per annum to $50,970.00 per annum.
CONTRACT : Not Contracted.
POSITION(S) : One (1)

Minimum Requirements: Bachelor's Degree in Accounting or directly related field and 2 years of fiscal experience related to area of assignment. Knowledge of: Applicable Federal, Commonwealth and local laws, codes, regulations and/or ordinances; Supervisory principles, practices and techniques (based on assignment); Generally accepted accounting principles; Financial analysis principles and techniques; Advanced mathematical concepts; Research methods; Customer service principles; Modern office technology. Skills in: Interpreting and applying applicable laws, codes, regulations and standards; Supervising, monitoring, training and evaluating staff (based on assignment); Providing guidance and leading work activities (based on assignment); Prioritizing activities and meeting deadlines; Preparing financial information, adjustments and entries related to general ledger; Researching, compiling, calculating and reconciling data and information; Researching technical issues, solving problems and providing solutions; Monitoring and maintaining fiscal account information and reporting; Reconciling data, preparing adjustments and posting account and journal entries; Providing attention to accuracy and detail; Preparing reports, correspondence and related fiscal documentation; Providing customer service; Providing technical guidance related to financial systems; Maintaining databases and financial records; Assisting with audits, inventory processes and/or equipment maintenance schedules; Utilizing a computer and relevant software applications; Utilizing communication and interpersonal skills as applied to interaction with coworkers, supervisor, the general public, and others to sufficiently exchange or convey information and to receive work direction. Applicants may be tested. Subject to pre-employment drug test.

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Mochitsuki Festival

PHOTOS By JON PEREZ

A local made up of high school students entertain the crowd that attended last Saturday's Mochitsuki Festival at the Paseo de Marianas in Garapan.

Jennifer's K-Pop group performs a dance number.

Local and foreign tourists enjoy the sight of the entries in the Christmas tree making contest.

Paseo de Marianas Promoters members help in making sure the glutinous rice is moist and wet before being pounded by the wooden mallet.

A tourist joins in the pounding of the rice cake.

Crowds gathered around the traditional pounding of the mochigome.

Marianas Visitors Authority community projects manager Martin Duenas, left, lends a hand in making mochi, Japanese rice cakes.

The Iransian Marianas, made up of Hopwood Middle School students, perform a local dance to the delight of the crowd.

Nation

In final year, Obama seeks to stave off lame-duck status

WASHINGTON (AP)—In June, during one of the best stretches of his presidency, Barack Obama strode through a West Wing hallway exclaiming, "Offense! Stay on offense!"

It was a rallying cry for a White House that suddenly seemed to find its footing in the final quarter of Obama's tenure. An Asia-Pacific trade agreement was moving forward, as was the diplomatic opening with Cuba and work on an historic nuclear accord with Iran. The Supreme Court upheld a key tenet of the president's long-embattled health care law and legalized gay marriage nationwide. Even in the depths of tragedy following a church shooting in Charleston, South Carolina, the president struck an emotional chord with his stirring eulogy for the victims.

"I said at the beginning of this year that interesting stuff happens in the fourth quarter—and we are only halfway through," Obama said during his annual year-end news conference.

But the seventh year of Obama's presidency also challenged anew his cautious and restrained approach to international crises, particularly in the Middle East. Attacks in Paris and San Bernardino, California, heightened fears of terror on American soil and Obama's attempts to reassure Americans fell flat. And a seemingly endless string of mass shootings elsewhere in the country exposed the sharp limits of Obama's power to implement the gun control measures he speaks of with passion.

AP

In this Nov. 19, 205 file photo, President Barack Obama listens as Canada's Prime Minister Justin Trudeau speaks during their bilateral meeting at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in Manila, Philippines.

Obama now stares down 11 months before his successor is chosen in an election shaping up to be a referendum on his leadership at home and abroad. He stirs deep anger among many Republicans, a constant reminder of his failure to make good on campaign promises to heal Washington's divisiveness. But he remains popular among Democrats and foresees a role campaigning for his party's nominee in the general election.

The president is packing his final year with foreign travel and has about a half-dozen trips abroad planned, including a likely visit to Cuba. The White House's legislative agenda is slim and centers mostly on areas where he already has overlapping priorities with Republicans, including final passage of the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade pact and criminal justice reform. But he's also eyeing provocative executive actions, including an expansion of background checks for gun purchases and the closure of the Guantanamo Bay detention center.

"We recognize there's limited time left," said Jennifer Psaki, Obama's communications director.

■■■

At times, Obama's second term has appeared to play out in reverse.

He struggled to capitalize on his decisive re-election victory in 2012, stumbling through a two-year stretch that exposed the limits of his power and made him a political liability for his party. Then in an unexpected twist, his party's devastating defeats in the 2014 midterm election spurred one of the most productive years of his presidency, positioning Obama to be a valuable political ally for Democratic presidential frontrunner Hillary Clinton.

"Barack Obama will loom over the election," said Dan Pfeiffer, a longtime Obama adviser who left the White House earlier this year.

Advisers say the Supreme Court's ruling in May, which upheld the subsidies at the heart of Obama's health care law, came as a particular relief to the president. The decision ensures the law survives his presidency, even as Republican candidates campaign on pledges to repeal it.

Obama sees the Iran nuclear accord, Pacific Rim trade pact and sweeping climate change agreement finalized in Paris earlier this month as examples of how America should wield its power on the world stage. The agreements have driven the debate in the presidential campaign for long stretches- a point of pride for a White House eager to show that the president remains the country's most relevant politician even as he eyes the exits.

Yet Obama hasn't been able to escape the Middle East. No matter how many times he tries to pivot to Asia or rebrand U.S. foreign policy as more about diplomacy than military might, the volatile region continues to be the dominant force in the way his foreign policy is viewed.

Nearly every candidate running for president—including Clinton, his former secretary of state—is calling for more aggressive action to fight the Islamic State group. Obama has inched the military deeper into the conflict, including backtracking on his refusal to put U.S. troops on the ground in Syria, but has largely stuck with his initial strategy of combating the extremist group from the air.

The terror attacks in Paris and California, however, have taken a worrying but distant fight against the Islamic State militants and made it top-of-mind for many Americans. White House advisers say Obama is well aware that he misjudged the public's level of anxiety about terrorism and must scramble to counter what he sees as overheated rhetoric from Republican presidential candidates that filled the void he created by his tepid initial response.

Death toll at least 7 in Texas storms that spawned tornadoes

DALLAS (AP)—Tornadoes swept through the Dallas area after dark on Saturday leaving substantial damage and at least seven people dead either from the storm or related traffic accidents, in the latest of a succession of freakish winter weather events across the country.

The Texas tornadoes followed days of tumultuous weather in the Southeast including unusual winter tornadoes that left 18 people dead there over the Christmas holiday period.

National Weather Service Meteorologist Anthony Bain in Fort Worth said several tornadoes touched down in the Dallas area, although the full extent of damage would not be known until daylight Sunday.

The storms left homes had roofs blown away, vehicles mangled or turned upside down, churches damaged, power lines down, natural gas lines burst, trees toppled and debris strewn across neighborhoods. The damage stretched over about a 40-mile-long area from 20 miles south of Dallas to northeast of the city.

Harn, police spokesman for Garland, about 20 miles northeast of Dallas, said four people were killed in vehicle accidents during the massive storm, but it's unclear if all four were in the same vehicle or how they died.

Three other people died in Collin County, about 45 miles northeast of Dallas, according to sheriff's deputy Chris Havey, although the circumstances were not immediately clear.

In the town of Rowlett near Garland, police spokesman Det. Cruz Hernandez said several people were injured although the exact number was known. Two families were barricaded in their homes, he said.

"As of right now, we are still in the search and rescue mode. We still have some homes that have been demolished and not everyone in the homes has been accounted for," Hernandez said.

Residents were being kept out of part of east Rowlett and heavy equipment was brought in to move debris from homes where people may be trapped inside.

Chicago police: Woman accidentally killed by officer fire

CHICAGO (AP)—A Chicago police officer responding to a domestic disturbance call accidentally shot and killed a 55-year-old woman, who was among two people fatally wounded by police gunfire, the department said late Saturday.

Relatives said Bettie Jones lived downstairs from Quintonio LeGrier, the 19-year-old who prompted the initial call to police and who also was killed.

Officers who responded to the call "were confronted by a combative subject resulting in the discharging of the officer's weapon," the Chicago Police Department said in a brief statement.

"The 55-year-old female victim was accidentally struck and tragically killed," reads the statement, which extends "deepest condolences to the victim's family and friends."

The shooting happened around 4:25 a.m., police said. The Cook County medical examiner's office and family members said Jones, a mother of five who had hosted family for Christmas, and LeGrier, a college student home for holiday break, were pronounced dead at hospitals within an hour.

Both Jones and LeGrier were black, the medical examiner's office said. Police did not immediately disclose the race of the officer, saying in a statement only that officers involved in the incident will be placed on administrative duties for 30 days while "training and fitness for duty requirements can be conducted."

The shooting comes amid ongoing scrutiny of police after a series of deaths of African-Americans at the hands of officers gave rise to the Black Lives Matter movement. The Chicago Police Department also is under a federal civil rights investigation that will look into patterns of racial disparity in the use of force.

The federal investigation, which also will review how the department disciplines officers and handles misconduct accusations, launched after last month's release of police dashcam video showing white officer Jason Van Dyke shooting black 17-year-old Laquan McDonald 16 times in 2014. The video's release has led to protests, the forced resignation of former Chicago Police Superintendent Garry McCarthy and calls from residents for Mayor Rahm Emanuel to step down.

It is not clear whether there are any video recordings of Saturday's shootings.

LeGrier's father told the Chicago Sun-Times he had invited his son to a family holiday gathering before the shooting but the younger man chose not to go. Antonio LeGrier said when he returned to his second-floor apartment early Saturday, his son appeared to be a "little agitated."

The elder LeGrier said he heard loud banging on his locked bedroom door around 4:15 a.m. and that his son said, "You're not going to scare me." He said his son tried to bust the door open, but he kept him from doing so and called police.

The father said he called Jones, who lived a floor below, and warned her that his son was a "little irate" and not to open the door unless police arrived. He said Jones told him she saw his son outside with a baseball bat.

When police arrived, Antonio LeGrier said he heard Jones yell, "Whoa, Whoa Whoa!" He said he heard gunshots as he made his way down from the second floor and then saw his son and Jones lying in the foyer.

Asia

India's Modi arrives in Pakistan on first visit as premier

ISLAMABAD (AP)—India's Narendra Modi made a surprise visit to Pakistan on Friday, his first such trip as prime minister to this Islamic nation that has been India's long-standing archrival in the region.

The previously unannounced visit is a potential sign of thawing relations between the two nuclear-armed neighbors. The two heads of government also had an unscheduled meeting at the Paris climate change talks earlier this month.

Since gaining independence from Britain in 1947, India and Pakistan have fought three wars, two of them over Kashmir, the Himalayan region that both countries claim.

Modi landed on Friday afternoon in the eastern city of Lahore and met with his Pakistani counterpart Nawaz Sharif, state-run media reported. The visit coincides with Sharif's birthday and the wedding of his granddaughter.

Security was beefed up at the Lahore International Airport shortly before Modi's arrival.

After spending about two hours with Modi at his residence, Sharif went to the Lahore airport along with Modi to see him off.

Sharif and Modi held a meeting in a "cordial and positive atmosphere" and they agreed to continue working for the welfare of people of their countries, Foreign Secretary Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry told reporters.

He said Modi called Sharif at about 11:30 a.m. on Friday and expressed his wish to visit Pakistan

"This is how this visit was suddenly planned," he said. Chaudhry termed Modi's visit a "gesture of good will" and hoped that it will help resolve all of their outstanding issues when the two sides resume talks in the near future.

AP

In this photo released by Press Information Department, India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi, right, shakes hands with his Pakistani counterpart Nawaz Sharif in Lahore, Pakistan, Friday, Dec. 25, 2015.

Earlier in the day, Pakistani Foreign Ministry spokesman Qazi Khalilullah said India had informed Pakistan about the visit on Friday. He refused to share any further details.

One of the first public signs of the visit came Friday morning when Modi, during a stop in the Afghan capital of Kabul, tweeted that he is "looking forward to meeting" Sharif in Lahore, "where I will drop by on my way back to Delhi." He said he also called Sharif and wished him happy birthday.

Sharif's sprawling residence had been colorfully decorated for his granddaughter's wedding reception when Modi arrived along with the Pakistani prime minister. The two leaders were later shown sitting together in a room looking happy and relaxed.

Analysts viewed the visit as a potential turning point in Pakistani-Indian relations.

"I think it is going to play a significant role in improving ties between the two South Asian archrivals," said Amanullah Memon, a professor of international relations at Preston University in the Pakistani capital, Islamabad.

Amitabh Matto, an Indian foreign policy expert, described Modi's birthday diplomacy visit as a "very positive step."

"Any step toward trying to stabilize and provide a new beginning to India-Pakistan ties is welcome and needs to be supported by all those who believe that India and Pakistan have a common destiny and it is in their interest to fight together their common problems, including terrorism and economic under-development," he said.

Tarun Vijay, a spokesman for Modi's Bharatiya Janata party, praised Modi's visit as a sign of statesmanship. "This is the best Christmas gift to the mankind which believes in peace and amity. He has risen to the commanding heights of being a statesman who can take a bold step surprising his friends and foes but melting ice in the relations," Vijay said

However Modi faced criticism from the main Indian opposition Congress Party as well.

"Heads of state don't drop in to give Christmas or birthday greetings, particularly when you have such a history of complex issues between the two countries. It should have been a proper structured state visit. We would have welcomed it," Anand Sharma, a Congress Party spokesman said.

Members of the Indian Youth Congress in New Delhi also staged a protest against the visit, during which they burned an effigy of Modi.

After a year of rising tensions, top security officials from India and Pakistan held talks in Thailand's capital earlier in December, discussing a range of issues, including Kashmir and ways to maintain peace along the countries' shared border. Also, two weeks ago, Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj visited Pakistan to attend a meeting on Afghanistan.

India accuses Pakistan of arming and training insurgents fighting for Kashmir's independence from India or its merger with Pakistan, a charge Islamabad denies. More than 68,000 people have been killed in ongoing Kashmir violence, which began in 1989.

Dozens missing as landslide hits Myanmar jade region

YANGON, Myanmar (AP)—Dozens of people are missing and feared dead after a landslide struck a remote jade mining region in northern Myanmar, the second such incident in a month, officials said Saturday.

The landslide occurred Friday in Kachin state's mining community of Hpakant, said Khin Maung Myint, a local member of the opposition National League for Democracy party. He joined rescue crews on Saturday, but said the steep terrain was complicating search efforts.

According to rescuers, one body was pulled from the rubble and at least 30 people were missing, he said.

Police said they could not yet confirm any fatalities.

Tin Tun Aung, a Hpakant township policeman, said search operations continued all day Saturday without any discovery of bodies.

"We are still trying to dig up the landslide," he said. "We don't know yet if there are dead people inside or not. We're doing it because we are worried people could be trapped inside."

A Nov. 21 landslide in the same region killed more than 100 people and highlighted the perilous conditions created by a breakneck effort to dig up the world's richest deposits of jade.

Most of the victims in last month's disaster were itinerant jade pickers and their families who made a living scavenging for scraps of jade in the debris left behind by mining companies.

Kachin state is home to some of the world's highest-quality jade, and the industry generated an estimated $31 billion last year, with most of the wealth going to individuals and companies tied to Myanmar's former military rulers, according to Global Witness, a group that investigates misuse of resource revenues.

Hpakant, 950 kilometers (600 miles) northeast of Myanmar's biggest city, Yangon, is the industry's epicenter. But it remains desperately poor, with bumpy dirt roads, constant electricity blackouts and sky-high heroin addiction rates.

Japan says armed China ship infiltrates off disputed islands

TOKYO (AP)—Japanese authorities said that for the first time Saturday, an armed Chinese coast guard vessel entered its territorial waters off islands claimed by both countries that are a flashpoint of disputes between the neighbors.

Japan's coast guard said the ship, armed with what appeared to be four gun turrets, was one of three Chinese coast guard vessels spotted inside Japanese waters in the East China Sea. It was the only one that was armed.

Chinese vessels regularly sail around the disputed islands, known as the Senkaku in Japanese and the Diaoyu in Chinese. But Japanese coast guard official Nanako Uehara said it was the first time an armed Chinese vessel had been sighted in Japan's waters.

The three vessels have since left the area.

The armed ship also was spotted Tuesday in the area, but Japanese officials said it didn't infiltrate Japan's waters at that time.

The latest development could trigger concerns in Japan that China may be escalating its activities in the disputed parts of the East China Sea.

Last month, a Chinese navy ship took its time traversing the waters. Japan earlier this year protested China's unilateral exploration of undersea oil and gas deposits in the East China Sea, posting photos online of Chinese drilling equipment.

Relations between the two countries also have been strained over wartime history, though there have been signs of improvement recently.

ASIAN BRIEFS

Christmas wildfire destroys more than 100 homes in Australia

SYDNEY (AP)—More than 100 homes have been destroyed by a Christmas Day wildfire that tore through a stretch of coastline popular with tourists in southern Australia. Fire officials in Victoria state say cooler weather on Saturday has eased the immediate threat from a blaze along the scenic Great Ocean Road. But officials warn the fire could continue burning for weeks. Victoria Emergency Management Commissioner Craig Lapsley said no one was injured by the blaze that destroyed 116 houses in the small towns of Wye River and Separation Creek. Hundreds of firefighters spent Christmas battling the blaze. The fire was triggered by a lightning strike and forced thousands from their homes. Destructive wildfires are common across much of Australia during the southern hemisphere summer.

Pakistani army chief leaves for Kabul to discuss peace talks

ISLAMABAD (AP)—Pakistan's powerful army chief has left for Kabul amid efforts to revive peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban. Military spokesman Lt. Gen. Asim Saleem Bajwa said army chief Gen. Raheel Sharif is traveling to Afghanistan with "sincerity and optimism" for better border management and to discuss peace process in Afghanistan. Sharif's visit comes more than two weeks after a regional conference held in Islamabad called for the resumption of Afghan-Taliban peace negotiations. The conference was attended by Afghan President Ashraf Ghani. The talks between the Taliban and Kabul have been on the hold since July, when Afghanistan announced the death of Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar.

Afghanistan records 12 injured in late-night earthquake

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP)—At least 12 people were injured in Afghanistan's eastern Nangarhar province after an earthquake jolted the country just before midnight Friday, officials said on Saturday. A number of Nangarhar University students in the provincial capital, Jalalabad, were injured during a stampede while trying to run out of a building during the quake, said Attaullah Khogyani, spokesman for the provincial governor. The magnitude 6.2 quake struck at around 11:45 p.m. on Friday and lasted about a minute. It was also felt in the capital, Kabul, sending residents rushing into the street for safety. The U.N.'s Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said two regions of Afghanistan were affected—east and northeast—but the expected impact was "small to medium scale." The quake's epicenter was in the Zebak district of Badakhshan province in the country's north, but no casualties or damage from the area had been reported, OCHA said.

World

IS leader says 'caliphate' well, mocks Saudi-led alliance

BEIRUT (AP)—The Islamic State group on Saturday released a new message purportedly from its reclusive leader, claiming that his self-styled "caliphate" is doing well despite an unprecedented alliance against it and criticizing the recently announced Saudi-led Islamic military coalition against terrorism.

In the 24-minute audio, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi said airstrikes by the international coalition only increase his group's determination and resolve. The message was al-Baghdadi's first since May, and comes amid battlefield setbacks that IS has recently faced.

Meanwhile, a U.S.-backed coalition of rebels in Syria - including Syrian Kurdish, Arab and Christian groups - captured a major dam on the Euphrates River from the Islamic State group as part of the coalition's march on IS-held areas in northern Syria.

The coalition, known as Syria Democratic Forces, announced earlier this week a new offensive aimed at cutting supply lines between IS strongholds in the country's north. The SDF said it seized the Tishrin Dam, which supplies much off northern Syria with electricity, on Saturday.

An SDF spokesman told AP earlier this week that his forces are also trying to cut the supply lines between the Islamic State's de-facto capital of Raqqa and the group's stronghold of Manbij in northern Syria.

The SDF, dominated by the main Kurdish militia in Syria known as YPG, or People's Protection Units, has become a main force in fighting IS.

The Islamic State group has come under pressure in Syria and Iraq, where it has declared its self-styled Islamic caliphate on territory that the militant group controls. It lost the town Sinjar in Iraq last month, and areas across the border in Syria at the same time. Iraqi government troops are also advancing in the Islamic State-held city of Ramadi, the provincial capital of the sprawling Anbar province, Iraq's Sunni heartland.

Airstrikes by the U.S.-led coalition and Russia in Syria have also destroyed Syrian oil facilities and killed several IS leaders in recent weeks.

"It is unprecedented in the history of our Ummah (Islamic nation) that all the world came against it in one battle, as it is happening today. It is the battle of all the disbelievers against all the Muslims," al-Baghdadi said.

He said the U.S.-led alliance does "not scare us... nor do they scatter our resolve because we are the victors in any event."

Al-Baghdadi also taunted the United States for not putting boots on the ground. "They do not dare to come, because their hearts are full of fear from the mujahideen,"or holy warriors, he said.

"America and its allies dream of destroying the caliphate through their proxies and henchmen, and whenever an alliance of theirs fails or a tail is cut, they hasten to establish another, until they recently declared the Salouli (Saudi) alliance that was falsely called Islamic," al-Baghdadi added.

If the Saudi-led alliance was truly Islamic, then it would fight the Syrian army and its Russian "masters," as well as Shiites and Jews, al-Baghdadi said.

In mid-December, Saudi Arabia announced the new, 34-member alliance against terrorism, to be based in the kingdom's capital, Riyadh. But Shiite powerhouse Iran is not part of the new coalition; neither are Iraq and Syria, whose forces are battling to regain ground from the Islamic State group and whose governments are allied with Tehran.

In the audio, al-Baghdadi also warned nations taking part in the war against IS by saying: "We promise you, God permitting, that whoever participates in the war against the Islamic State will pay the price dearly."

He threatened Israel by saying, "we haven't forgotten you" and "we are getting closer to you" every day. To Israeli Jews, he said that they "will hide behind trees and stones" from the IS.

AP

This file image made from video posted on a militant website Saturday, July 5, 2014, purports to show the leader of the Islamic State group, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, delivering a sermon at a mosque in Iraq during his first public appearance.

WORLD BRIEFS

Benin prime minister fine after helicopter crash, gov't says

COTONOU, Benin (AP)—The spokesman for Benin's Interior Ministry says a helicopter carrying Benin's prime minister has crashed in the country's northwest, but he is unhurt. Leonce Houngbadji said Saturday the helicopter crashed while landing at a stadium in Djougou, in the northwest. He said no one in the helicopter was hurt. He said he has spoken several times with Prime Minister Lionel Zinsou since the crash. He did not give the reason for the crash. The prime minister's daughter, Marie-Cecile Zinsou, has also confirmed that her father is alive, and there were no other victims in the crash in the West African country.

Costa Rica moves to deport 56 Cuban migrants

SAN JOSE, Costa Rica (AP)—Authorities in Costa Rica have begun deportation proceedings for 56 Cuban migrants who entered that Central American nation after it stopped issuing special transit visas for Cubans who are trying to get to the United States. Costa Rican Immigration Director Kathya Rodriguez said Saturday that the 56 Cubans are being held in the capital city of San Jose. They are not among the approximately 8,000 Cubans who have been stranded in Costa Rica since Nov. 13, when Nicaragua began rejecting Cubans from crossing its territory. Costa Rica stopped giving out transit visas to Cubans on Dec. 18. Thousands of Cubans had been migrating through Central America in fear that the year-old warming in U.S.-Cuban relations could end the special immigration privileges Cubans have in the United States.

Floods force mass evacuations in 4 South American countries

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina (AP)—Widespread floods have forced nearly 140,000 people from their homes in Paraguay, Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil following days of torrential rains that drenched a region where the countries border each other. Paraguay is the hardest hit with at least 100,000 evacuating according to the National Emergency Department. Argentina's state-run news agency Telam reports that 20,000 people suffered the same fate in that nation, while Uruguay's National Emergency System says some 9,000 were displaced by rivers that overflowed their banks. The civil defense department in the southern Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul says at least 7,000 people had to leave their homes.

Top rebel's death in Syria reshuffles deck ahead of talks

BEIRUT (AP)—With Syrian peace talks scheduled to begin next month in Geneva, the assassination last week of a top Syrian rebel commander could alter the balance of power and reshuffle the lineup of key players on the ground battling President Bashar Assad's government.

On Saturday, the Army of Islam and allied militant groups in Syria mourned the killing of Zahran Alloush, while government supporters and the Islamic State group cheered his death—a reflection of his role in fighting both sides in the Syrian civil war.

Allouch was killed in airstrikes that targeted the group's headquarters during a meeting on Friday. He was instantly killed along with a number of senior commanders of his Army of Islam group and those of the ultraconservative Ahrar al-Sham and the Faylaq al-Rahman groups.

The Syrian army claimed responsibility for the airstrike that killed Allouch, although many among the opposition blamed Russia, which has been bombing IS targets and other insurgent groups since late September.

Allouch was a controversial figure in the war and an authoritative rebel leader who commanded thousands of fighters on the doorstep of Damascus, the seat of Assad's power. His death may have contributed—at least partially—to a delay in an agreed-on pullout of thousands of militants and their families from neighborhoods on the southern edge of Damascus.

The pullout, supposed to start on Saturday, was to involve mainly militants from the Islamic State group who earlier this year overran the Yarmouk area, which is home to a Palestinian refugee camp and has been hotly contested and fought-over in the war, and two adjacent neighborhoods.

A Palestinian official in Damascus, Anwar Abdulhadi, told The Associated Press that the withdrawal is being delayed for "logistical reasons." But Lebanon's Hezbollah-run TV station Al Manar said that Allouch was a key figure in arranging the rare deal, and that his assassination has delayed its implementation. The report could not be immediately confirmed by the AP.

Allouch's killing—a month before peace talks are scheduled to begin between the Syrian government and opposition rebel groups—is a blow to insurgents fighting to topple Assad and a boost to government forces who have been bolstered by the Russian military intervention in Syria.

The Army of Islam took part earlier this month in an opposition meeting held in Saudi Arabia during which it agreed to take part in political talks seeking to end the five-year-old conflict scheduled for late January in Geneva. The Syrian government describes the group as "terrorists" and has said it will not negotiate with such factions.

Turkish civilians stuck in urban war zone in southeast

ISTANBUL (AP)—Tens of thousands of civilians in southeast Turkey have been caught in the middle as government forces and Kurdish militants battle it out in urban areas— violence that has shattered hopes of reviving peace talks.

Turkish security forces launched a large-scale operation last week hoping to rout militants linked to the outlawed Kurdistan Worker's Party, or PKK, and say more than 180 of them have been killed. Thousands of troops and tanks have been sent to crush pockets of resistance across mainly Kurdish districts, where PKK fighters and youth have set up trenches to keep them at bay. Flashpoints have been under a 24-hour curfew since mid-December.

While there have been repeated clashes and long curfews since the collapse of peace talks in July, many in the region had hoped the talks would resume after a November election gave a decisive majority to the Justice and Development Party founded by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Instead, the fighting has gotten worse.

"If things continue like this, we will become just like Syria," says Mehmet Salih Bagata, a lawyer in the southeastern town of Cizre, the scene of the heaviest clashes and the highest reported fatalities since authorities stepped up military operations.

The leader of the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party, which made history when it entered parliament in June but lost seats in the November vote, has attempted to mediate the conflict with the PKK, repeatedly urging both sides to "silence their arms."

Residents of Cizre say they are fast running out of food and water, and rights abuses have been rife. Shops have been shuttered for 11 days as a result of the government curfew. The fighting means many are stranded at home or in basements and those in need of medical attention cannot reach hospitals.

"People are waiting and hoping for the peace process," said Cihan Sariyildiz, a pharmacist in Cizre.

The situation is similar in the southeastern town of Silopi, near the border with Syria and Iraq, where residents are struggling to survive the round-the-clock curfew, fighting and power cuts. One lawmaker said more than 11 civilians have been killed in Silopi since Dec. 14, when the curfew was imposed to aid security operations. She says the fighting is so intense that families are unable to bury their dead.

Health & Fitness

Study: Some cardiac arrest victims ignore warning symptoms

By LAURAN NEERGAARD
AP MEDICAL WRITER

WASHINGTON (AP)—Sudden cardiac arrest may not always be so sudden: New research suggests a lot of people may ignore potentially life-saving warning signs hours, days, even a few weeks before they collapse.

Cardiac arrest claims about 350,000 U.S. lives a year. It's not a heart attack, but worse: The heart abruptly stops beating, its electrical activity knocked out of rhythm. CPR can buy critical time, but so few patients survive that it's been hard to tell if the longtime medical belief is correct that it's a strike with little or no advance warning.

An unusual study that has closely tracked sudden cardiac arrest in Portland, Oregon, for over a decade got around that roadblock, using interviews with witnesses, family and friends after patients collapse and tracking down their medical records.

About half of middle-aged patients for whom symptom information could be found had experienced warning signs, mostly chest pain or shortness of breath, in the month before suffering a cardiac arrest, researchers reported Monday. The research offers the possibility of one day preventing some cardiac arrests if doctors could figure out how to find and treat the people most at risk.

AP
This Jan. 4, 2008 file photo shows Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles. Sudden cardiac arrest may not always be so sudden: New research shows a lot of people ignore potentially life-saving warning signs in the days and weeks before they collapse.

"By the time the 911 call is made, it's much too late for at least 90 percent of people," said Dr. Sumeet Chugh of the Cedars-Sinai Heart Institute in Los Angeles, who led the study reported in Annals of Internal Medicine. "There's this window of opportunity that we really didn't know existed."

Importantly, a fraction of patients considered their symptoms bad enough to call 911 before they collapsed, and they were most likely to survive.

That's a reminder to the public not to ignore possible signs of heart trouble in hopes they're just indigestion, said University of Pittsburgh emergency medicine specialist Dr. Clifton Callaway, who wasn't involved in Monday's study but praised it.

"Chest pain, shortness of breath—those are things you should come in the middle of the night to the emergency department and get checked out," said Callaway, who chairs the American Heart Association's emergency care committee. "We strongly recommend you don't try to ride it out at home."

Previous heart attacks, coronary heart disease, and certain inherited disorders that affect heartbeat all can increase the risk of sudden cardiac arrest. People known to be at high risk may receive an implanted defibrillator to shock the heart back into rhythm. But cardiac arrest is such a public health problem that the Institute of Medicine last summer urged a national campaign to teach CPR, so more bystanders know how to help.

Monday's data from the Oregon Sudden Unexpected Death Study examined records for nearly 1,100 people ages 35 to 65 who suffered a cardiac arrest between 2002 and 2012.

For about a quarter of patients, researchers could find no information about whether they experienced symptoms—making it impossible to say just how common warning signs really are.

New advice on who qualifies for cholesterol-lowering statins

WASHINGTON (AP)—Considering a cholesterol-lowering statin to prevent a heart attack? Deciding who's a good candidate requires calculating more than a simple cholesterol level.

A government task force says the popular medications will be of most benefit to some people ages 40 to 75 whose risk of cardiovascular disease over the next decade is at least 10 percent. But Monday's draft guidelines from the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force left some wiggle room, saying certain patients who aren't at quite as high a risk still might benefit and should weigh the pros and cons for themselves.

"The benefit from statins is going to be the largest in the people who are at the highest risk," explained Dr. Douglas Owens, a Stanford University professor and task force member.

The recommendations are similar to controversial 2013 guidelines from the American Heart Association and American College of Cardiology.

Here are some things to know about making the statin decision.

WHAT ARE STATINS?

Lipitor, Crestor, Zocor and other statins have been the standard treatment for lowering cholesterol for more than 20 years, working by curbing its production in the liver. Statins generally lower cholesterol levels by about 25 to 35 percent. They've long been recommended for people who already have heart disease. The bigger question is who should use them to prevent heart disease in the first place.

WHO SHOULD GET THEM

The task force said doctors should offer a statin to adults ages 40 to 75 who either smoke or have high cholesterol, suffer from high blood pressure or diabetes and also have at least a 10 percent risk of a heart attack or stroke over the next 10 years.

That's a complicated checklist. What if people meet all the criteria except the 10-year risk? Those whose 10-year risk is at least 7.5 percent might still benefit from a statin, but they should discuss it with their doctor and make their own decision, the task force concluded. (The most common side effect is muscle pain and damage.)

As for people over 75, the task force said there's not enough evidence to tell if they'd benefit from statins to prevent heart disease.

HOW TO CALCULATE RISK

The task force endorsed usage of an online calculator available through the American Heart Association's web site.

Doctors plug in information about the patient's age, sex, race and other health conditions in addition to the level of LDL cholesterol, the so-called bad kind. That's because recent research shows the combination of factors is particularly important—that someone who might not have qualified for statins on the basis of an LDL level alone could benefit if other factors raise their overall risk.

"We recommend that people between 40 and 75 have an assessment of their cardiovascular risk and that's not just triggered by your cholesterol," Owens said.

WHAT OTHER GUIDELINES SAY

The 2013 guidelines from the heart association and college of cardiology recommended that doctors consider statins in people ages 40 to 75 whose 10-year risk is 7.5 percent or higher. Those guidelines were controversial because they made millions more Americans eligible for statins than older recommendations that focused more on cholesterol levels.

While Monday's task force conclusion was that people at higher risk get more benefit, the two sets of advice are consistent, said American Heart Association spokesman Dr. Donald Lloyd-Jones of Northwestern University.

Monday's recommendations are open for public comment through January 25.

Personal Trainer
Using your water wisely
In ways, water is your most important outdoor safety equipment because dehydration is dangerous and impairs your judgment as it begins.
Some guides to water management
Never delay drinking
Use a water bladder or easy-to-reach bottle so you can drink often; sip often rather than drinking deeply every few hours
Never hold back or ration water
Drink to keep from getting thirsty, even if you don't know where you will find your next water; you need water to keep your thinking clear
Eat regularly with water
Food keeps your muscles fueled and replaces sodium depleted by sweating; remember that carbohydrates require less water to digest than fats or protein
Drink cold water in the heat
Cold water makes stomach muscles contract, pushing the water into your intestines, where it is absorbed
• As you begin to exercise
When you first feel fatigued, drink water
• After exercise
Eat carbs – a bagel, banana or sports bar – with about 12 oz. (360 ml) of water
Source: Backpacking
Graphic: Paul Trap, Tribune News Service

Life & Style

Calif. governor pardons Robert Downey Jr. in drug conviction

Downey

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP)—The governor of California pardoned Robert Downey Jr. on Thursday for a nearly 20-year-old felony drug conviction that led to the Oscar-nominated actor's imprisonment for roughly a year.

Downey was among 91 people granted pardons for criminal convictions after demonstrating they had rehabilitated themselves and been out of custody for at least 10 years, Gov. Jerry Brown's office announced.

The pardon does not erase records of a conviction but is a public proclamation that the person has remained out of trouble and demonstrated exemplary behavior, according to material on Brown's website.

Downey, once a courthouse mainstay for a series of drug-related arrests, has become one of Hollywood's greatest success stories for career and addiction rehabilitation.

Since 2008, Downey has portrayed "Iron Man" in a series of Disney blockbuster films, including "The Avengers," based on the Marvel comic books.

The 50-year-old actor is a two-time Oscar nominee for his roles in 1992's "Chaplin" and 2008's "Tropic Thunder."

Downey's legal troubles began in June 1996 when he was stopped for speeding on Pacific Coast Highway and authorities found cocaine, heroin and a pistol in his vehicle.

In 1999, he was sent to prison for roughly a year after he acknowledged violating his probation.

Downey obtained the pardon after getting a judge to issue a certificate of rehabilitation, according to a proclamation released by Brown's office. It said Downey has "lived an honest and upright life, exhibited good moral character, and conducted himself as a law-abiding citizen."

An email sent to Downey's agent Jim Toth and a call to his attorney Blair Berk were not immediately returned.

The Democratic governor, a former Jesuit seminarian, has made it a practice to issue pardons around Christian holidays.

IN GOD'S LOVING CARE

†Brianna Vernick
Leon Guerrero Camacho

"Bing Bing"

August 22, 1994 – December 22, 2015

Our Beloved Brianna Vernick enters the gates of heaven and will be greeted and reunited with her:

Maternal Grandmother: †Vertilia C. Leon Guerrero
Paternal Grandfather: †Nicolas C. Leon Guerrero
Great Grand Parents: †Albert S. Camacho
†Primitiva Dlg. Camacho
†Rosario A. Camacho
Uncle: †Jerry S. Camacho
Great Aunt: †Elphidia C. Sablan

Brianna's great laughter, pleasant personality, and loving memories will forever be treasured by her:

Parents: Tina Marie Leon Guerrero and
Brian Songao Camacho

Siblings: Leovanie Jane Camacho (Ray) and Children
Brian Camacho, Jr. (Michelle) and Children
Audrey Jean & Darrel Roligat & Children
Ronald Leon Leon Guerrero Ealey, Jr. (Son)
Vertilia Mercedes Leon Guerrero Camacho (Stevie)
Zenavee Mitchanie Camacho Ladore

Grandparents: Mr. Dionicio S. & Mrs. Mercedes A. Camacho

God Sisters in Heart: Rockissa Leon Guerrero
God Brothers in Heart: Swayze, Michael Joshua, Nicolas Leon Guerrero
Jonah, Sergio, Marc and Logan Mendiola

God Parents: Claire M. and Michael Leon Guerrero (Baptism)
Barbara C. and Mariano Mendiola (Confirmation)

Brianna Vernick is also loved and cherished by numerous aunts, uncles, cousins, nephews, nieces and friends.

Daily Mass of intentions are offered as follows:

Wednesday	12/23/2015	05:00 a.m.
Thursday	12/24/2015	05:00 a.m.
Friday	12/25/2015	08:00 a.m.
Saturday	12/26/2015	06:00 a.m.
Sunday	12/27/2015	06:00 a.m.
Monday	12/28/2015	06:00 a.m.
Tuesday	12/29/2015	06:00 a.m.

Brianna Vernick will be with us for the last time on Wednesday December 30, 2015. Visitation and last respects are welcomed beginning 09:00 a.m. at Mount Carmel Cathedral. Mass for Christian Burial will be celebrated at 11:00 a.m. Followed immediately with interment at Mount Carmel Cemetery where she will be laid to rest.

Your thoughts and most especially your prayers are sincerely appreciated.

Brian and Tina Marie Camacho
and Family

Powder horn believed to be Alexander Hamilton's for auction

TRENTON, N.J. (AP)—A New Jersey dentist believes an engraved piece of cow horn that goes up for auction next month symbolizes the American dream for a man who was key to the founding of the United States and is now the focus of a blockbuster hip-hop Broadway musical.

A descendant, an arms appraiser and a forensic documents expert said they believe Alexander Hamilton used the horn to carry gunpowder.

The powder horn is inscribed with his name and 1773, the year in which Hamilton, born out of wedlock in the Caribbean island of Nevis and later orphaned, entered what today is Columbia University. Hamilton would have used it leading troops during the Revolutionary War and as an aide to Gen. George Washington.

It could have been by his side above the banks of the Hudson River in Weehawken, New Jersey, when the man who was the nation's first treasury secretary was mortally wounded in a duel with Aaron Burr in 1804 and died at age 49.

"It's a symbol of hopes and aspirations, and it's such a positive symbol of his future," said Dr. Warren Richman.

Richman acquired it from a patient in 1990 and spent years trying to document its authenticity and studying its etchings, which include a unicorn.

He hopes someone will purchase the powder horn and perhaps donate it to a museum. It goes up for auction in person, online and by telephone on what would have been Hamilton's birthday, Jan. 11, at Sterling Associates in Closter, New Jersey. The opening bid is expected to be $10,000.

Hamilton has lately become the unlikely subject of a smash hip-hop musical on Broadway that's the hottest ticket in town. Written and starring Lin-Manuel Miranda, the show tells the true story of how an orphan immigrant from the Caribbean rose to the highest ranks of American society, as told by a young African-American and Latino cast.

"Hamilton" was a sold-out sensation this year when it debuted at the Public Theater, with people paying well over 10 times the $120 ticket price and a crush of fans seeking tickets through a lottery. When it transferred to Broadway, President Barack Obama came to see it.

The show, which regularly pulls in $1.5 million a week to sold-out audiences, has won awards from the Outer Critics Circle, the New York Drama Critics' Circle and the Drama Desk, and it is a likely candidate for Tony Awards this summer. The show's cast album became the highest-debuting cast recording on the Billboard Top 200 in over 50 years.

The musical has spurred people to visit the New York City home that Hamilton built in 1800, which today, after being relocated twice, is the Hamilton Grange National Memorial.

Visitation is up almost 250 percent per month since the Broadway show premiered, John Warren of the National Park Service said. There were 2,004 visitors in October 2014, compared with 6,735 in October 2015, Warren said.

The Hamilton family was deeply in debt when he died in the duel, and his family had to sell many of his possessions. But the home, in the Hamilton Heights section of Manhattan named for Hamilton, does have several original furnishings, Warren said.

AP

In a Tuesday, Dec. 15, 2015, photo, a horn believed to have been owned by Alexander Hamilton is photographed at Antique NJ in Closter, N.J. The horn will be put up for auction on Jan. 11, 2016.

Queen Elizabeth II's Christmas message: Light can triumph

SANDRINGHAM, England (AP)—Queen Elizabeth II used her Christmas message Friday to proclaim that light can triumph over darkness in these perilous times—and to comment on the joys of having a new great-granddaughter, Princess Charlotte.

Elizabeth, who this year became Britain's longest-reigning monarch, acknowledged the difficult times the world faces but said there is no cause for despair, no reason to give up hope. The queen's speech has been a tradition in Britain since Elizabeth first delivered a Christmas message live on radio in 1952.

"It is true that the world has had to confront moments of darkness this year, but the Gospel of John contains a verse of great hope, often read at Christmas carol services: 'The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it'."

On a lighter note, she remarked on the birth of Charlotte to Prince William and his wife, Kate, in May.

"One of the joys of living a long life is watching one's children, then grandchildren, then great-grandchildren, help decorate the Christmas tree. And this year my family has a new member to join in the fun," she said.

She spoke in a prerecorded message from the 18th Century Room at Buckingham Palace, sitting next to a decorated fireplace and Christmas tree.

The highly personal Christmas message is a focal point of the royal family's holidays. The queen writes the brief speech herself, while she receives help from senior ministers on most other speeches.

She often refers to her Christian faith during the talk, as she did this time, but she also made clear that the beauty of a decorated Christmas tree can be enjoyed by people of all faiths and by those without formal religious belief.

Elizabeth wore a white and silver tweed day dress by Angela Kelly during the speech, accessorizing it with an art deco diamond and aquamarine brooch that belonged to her late mother. The table she sat next to was decorated with a portrait of Prince William, Kate and young Prince George.

The senior royals usually spend the Christmas holidays at Sandringham, a sprawling estate in Norfolk, 110 miles (175 kilometers) north of London. They usually exchange gifts on Christmas Eve and attend a church service on the grounds before enjoying a gala lunch and, sometimes, a walk in the woods.

This year Princess Charlotte and "big" brother Prince George, age 2, did not attend the traditional Christmas Day service at St. Mary Magdalene Church.

The queen, in a festive red coat, arrived in a Bentley to lead the family to the service amid some sprinkles of rain.

Prince Charles and his wife Camilla were among the royals attending as some 1,000 well-wishers gathered outside hoping for a glimpse.

Prince William, Prince Harry and Kate came as well. Kate wore a green coat and matching hat.

The Christmas message—a time-honored British tradition—will be posted on the royal YouTube channel for maximum exposure.

Nordic countries in annual contest to claim real Santa

HELSINKI (AP)—Most kids learn that Santa Claus comes from the North Pole, but children in Scandinavia are taught he lives a bit further south. Where exactly is a matter of much debate, with businesses in Finland, Sweden and Norway competing to cash in on the cachet that comes with claiming Santa's hometown.

Finnish children know his home to be in the mythological Korvatunturi (Ear mountain) in the northern wilderness of the Finnish part of Lapland while Swedes say he hails from the small town of Mora. Norwegians claim he was born hundreds of years ago under a stone in Drobak on the Oslo fjord.

Danes, who enjoy milder and mostly snowless winters, teach their children that Santa's home is on the distant Arctic island of Greenland, a sparsely populated semiautonomous Danish territory.

In the battle to beat their Scandinavian neighbors, Finland's public broadcaster YLE every year sends out a video of a red-cloaked Santa leaving his log cabin on a sleigh drawn by a white reindeer in the frozen snowy landscape that reaches millions of viewers worldwide. A regular feature for the past 30 years, it was first broadcast in 1960.

The biggest town in Finnish Lapland, Rovaniemi, has been dubbed the official hometown of Santa Claus and depends on the myth for a large part of its yearly tourism turnover of some 210 million euros ($230 million). Situated just south of the Arctic Circle, it attracts more than 300,000 visitors annually—five times the town's population.

"Santa Claus is a very important and known person globally ... and that's a good basis for us to build up this kind of business," Mayor Esko Lotvonen said in a recent interview with The Associated Press.

The origins of Santa Claus—widely known elsewhere in Europe also as St. Nicholas—are shrouded in the mists of mythology, but the benevolent figure is believed to be based on St. Nicholas of Myra, a 4th century Greek Christian bishop who lived in a province of the Byzantine Empire that now is Turkey.

Danes, Swedes and Norwegians base their Santa on a mythological figure—a gnome known as a "tomte" or "nisse" in the Scandinavian languages—whereas Finns, who are ethnically and linguistically a different people, know Santa as "joulupukki," a Christmas buck or goat, derived from old pagan Norse mythology.

In the Nordic region, Santa doesn't clamber down chimneys but visits homes on Dec. 24, meeting the children, or if he's too busy leaving behind a bag or basket of presents.

Mora in central Sweden has claimed itself as Santa's home since 1984, with some 50,000 visiting Santaworld annually.

Nicklas Lind, director of Santaworld, which includes Santa's house, a troll safari, moose park and restaurants, says the town, known for its knives and an annual 90-kilometer cross-country skiing race, welcomes the extra money brought in by Santa but was unable to give figures.

"It's very important for the region and the town, for hotels and skiing," he said. "We get some millions; that's all I can say."

The message that Santa's home is somewhere in the Nordic region has spread far and wide. Santaworld's post office has received 400,000 letters this year addressed to Santa, his post office in Rovaniemi claims more than 500,000 letters with 100,000 more expected before the year-end.

The Norwegian Santa in Drobak is too busy to talk as Christmas approaches. Instead, his cousin Tom picks up the phone but doesn't want to discuss business.

"It's time for Christmas cheer not for competition, but we can't be angry if our good colleagues in Sweden, Finland and Greenland think otherwise," he says. "All Norwegian children know the real Santa lives here."

A group of schoolboys enjoying their Christmas break at a shopping mall in Helsinki are just as confident Santa is from Finland.

Six-year-old Matias, who doesn't want to give his family name, looks puzzled when asked the question, before blurting out: "He lives in Korvatunturi (Ear mountain), of course."

"And he's coming to see us again, he did last year," Matias says.

UK's Christmas No. 1 goes to charity song, not Justin Bieber

LONDON (AP)—The National Health Service Choir has beaten Justin Bieber to capture Britain's official Christmas No. 1 song—and he's OK with that.

Bieber

The Canadian pop star's "Love Yourself" was ahead earlier this week—but then Bieber tweeted that he wanted fans to "do the right thing" and boost the charity single to the coveted spot.

The choir's mash-up "A Bridge Over You" on Friday finished nearly 31,000 copies ahead of Bieber in the singles competition—although he still commands three of the top five spots.

The choir said "it's a brilliant celebration for the NHS across the country, so well done and thank you everyone." Proceeds will go to several health-related charities.

The NHS, founded in 1948, is a source of national pride for many Britons.

Colbert respects Trump's populist appeal

NEW YORK (AP)—Stephen Colbert may not respect much of what Donald Trump says, but he does admire the Republican's ability to craft a message that many voters are responding to.

Colbert

"There is a populism to Trump that I find very appealing," Colbert said on an interview to be shown on CBS' "Face the Nation" this Sunday. "And it's only this: The party elders want him to go away, but the people have decided that he's not going to."

The "Late Show" host, like most late-night comedians, has feasted on the New York businessman's campaign. And he makes it clear that he disagrees with many of Trump's "more than a little shocking" policy proposals.

But his ability to attract support in the face of establishment rejection is "the one saving grace of his candidacy," Colbert said.

Colbert's comments come with their own backdrop. After a fast start in September, he's been sagging in the ratings against competitors Jimmy Fallon and Jimmy Kimmel. A poll found Colbert is more popular among Democrats than Republicans, perhaps a vestige of his character as a blowhard political commentator on Comedy Central's "The Colbert Report."

Colbert told "Face the Nation" moderator John Dickerson that one of the reasons he ended "The Colbert Report" was a sense that people were getting tired of divisiveness.

"That's what I was aping," Colbert said. "And I thought, 'I can't really drink that cup anymore.'"

'Real Housewives' star Teresa Giudice is freed from prison

MONTVILLE, N.J. (AP)—"Real Housewives of New Jersey" star Teresa Giudice was freed from prison Wednesday after serving nearly a year for bankruptcy fraud, and she returned home to spend Christmas with her family.

Giudice

Giudice's lawyer said she was released at about 5 a.m. from the Danbury Federal Correctional Institution in Connecticut.

She traveled home to Montville, New Jersey, in a black SUV and will be placed on home confinement until Feb. 5, attorney James Leonard said, though she is expected to spend Christmas Eve at her brother's home.

Giudice had a "very emotional, very powerful" reunion with her husband and four daughters, Leonard said.

"She's safe and sound in her own home. She's very happy to be here," Leonard said. "She's very much looking forward to a nice, quiet, low-key holiday with her family."

A black Lexus SUV with a red bow on top was waiting in the driveway when she arrived.

Giudice was sent to prison to serve a 15-month sentence in January. She earned early release with good behavior.

She and her husband, Joe Giudice, pleaded guilty last year to bankruptcy fraud. They admitted hiding assets from bankruptcy creditors and submitting phony loan applications to get about $5 million in mortgages and construction loans.

Joe Giudice is expected to start his own 3 1/2 -year prison sentence in March. A federal judge staggered the couple's sentences in deference to their daughters.

Janet Jackson postpones 'Unbreakable' tour, citing surgery

In this June 28, 2015, file photo, Janet Jackson accepts the ultimate icon: music dance visual award at the BET Awards in Los Angeles. AP

LOS ANGELES (AP)—Janet Jackson says she is postponing her "Unbreakable" tour to have an unspecified surgical procedure.

The 49-year-old singer posted a message on her website and social media sites Thursday announcing that all future tour dates had been postponed until the spring. No new dates were announced.

The singer's statement asked for prayers of support and said no further details on her medical condition would be disclosed.

Jackson had been next scheduled to perform Jan. 9 in Denver.

Her "Unbreakable" tour has been the Top 20 global concert tour listing compiled by Pollstar.

Jackson's catalog of hits dates back to the mid-1980s, ranging from "What Have You Done for Me Lately" to "That's the Way Love Goes" and "All for You."

Bristol Palin announces birth of second child, a daughter

ANCHORAGE, Alaska (AP)—Bristol Palin, the 25-year-old daughter of 2008 U.S. Republican vice presidential nominee Sarah Palin, is a mother for the second time.

Palin, who launched an abstinence campaign after giving birth as an unwed teenage mother, posted on Instagram Thursday that she gave birth to a girl, Sailor Grace, on Wednesday.

"Our family couldn't be more complete," she wrote beneath a photo of her and her sleeping baby.

Palin has not publicly identified the father, but announced she was pregnant shortly after her engagement to Medal of Honor recipient Dakota Meyer was broken off last spring.

"I know this has been, and will be, a huge disappointment to my family, to my close friends, and to many of you," she wrote on her blog when she announced her second pregnancy. She asked for privacy for her and her son, Tripp.

In this July 27, 2012 file photo, Bristol Palin attends the "Dancing with the Stars: All Stars" panel at the Disney ABC Television Critics Association session in Beverly Hills, Calif. AP

"I do not want any lectures and I do not want any sympathy," she wrote.

On Thursday, Meyer tweeted: "Best Christmas present ever!! I couldn't be more proud of this little blessing."

Bristol Palin was 18 when her mother, then governor of Alaska, was selected by U.S. Sen. John McCain to be his running mate. Shortly after that, it was announced the teenager was pregnant with her first child. At the time, Sarah Palin said her daughter and the baby's father would marry. They did not.

Bristol Palin later became a paid spokeswoman advocating abstinence and warning against teenage pregnancies. She also performed on "Dancing with the Stars" and had a short-lived cable TV show called "Life's a Tripp."

Young couple needs a break to see if they fit together

DEAR ABBY: I'm a 20-year-old college student. I have never dated anyone besides my current boyfriend, "Cody." He's my first-ever boyfriend. I met him in high school, but we ran into each other in college and quickly began a relationship. We're now into our third year together.

We have professed our love for each other. He never said "I love you" to any of his past girlfriends, and I'm happy he said it to me.

My concern is that we talk like we'll be together forever. I think I'd be happy, but should I worry that I'll never know if there may be other guys I feel a stronger connection to? Or if I have enough experience to know what love is?

JUST THINKING IN FLORIDA

DEAR JUST THINKING: If you're writing to me, you ARE worrying. While for many couples their first love is also their last one, for many others it isn't, which may be why there are so many exes in this world.

My advice is to tell Cody that while you care for him, you feel it would be better for both of you to take a break and see other people. In some cases, it can cement a relationship. In others, it can destroy it. Going that route can be risky, but if either partner is having any doubts, that's the road to take.

■■■

DEAR ABBY: My father died last month. He'd had a massive stroke and was incapacitated for the last 10 days of his life and was on life support.

After I arrived at the hospital, I received a call from a woman who informed me that she is my half-sister. It was upsetting, to say the least. Not only was I losing my father, but I never thought he could keep a secret of this magnitude from me. Because I was angry, I wasn't friendly toward her.

Should I initiate a relationship with this woman? I'm 38. My siblings and I were born during my parents' marriage. This woman's mother is someone he had an affair with before, during and after his marriage. I have mixed emotions because I feel loyal to my mother, and I'm devastated by my father's deception regarding this child.

UPSET IN GEORGIA

DEAR UPSET: I doubt your mother will welcome this person's presence in her life, so at least for now, I think reaching out would be a mistake. Your mother might perceive it as almost as much of a betrayal as your father's was with his girlfriend. Before going further, the question you need to ask yourself is, "Would the benefit outweigh the cost?" Until you can answer that, my advice is to do nothing.

■■■

Good advice for everyone—teens to seniors—is in "The Anger in All of Us and How to Deal With It." To order, send your name and mailing address, plus check or money order for $7 (U.S. funds) to: Dear Abby, Anger Booklet, P.O. Box 447, Mount Morris, IL 61054-0447. (Shipping and handling are included in the price.)

DEAR ABBY

By ABIGAIL VAN BUREN
UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE

Dear Abby is written by Abigail Van Buren, also known as Jeanne Phillips, and was founded by her mother, Pauline Phillips. Contact Dear Abby at www.DearAbby.com or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, CA 90069.

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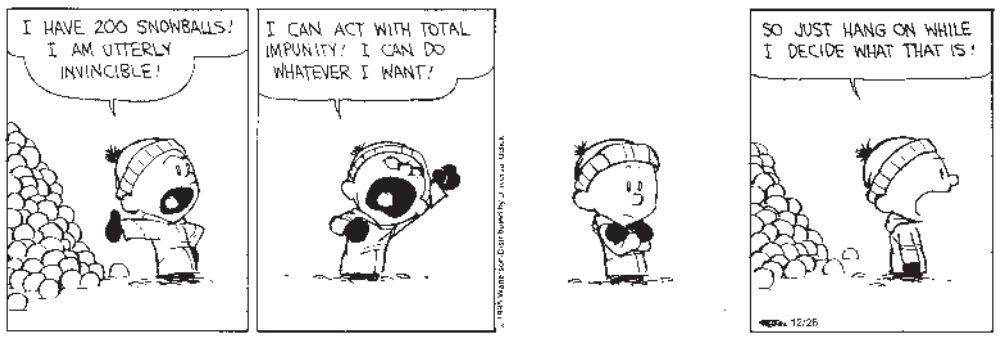
Pastimes

Calvin and Hobbes

By Bill Waterson

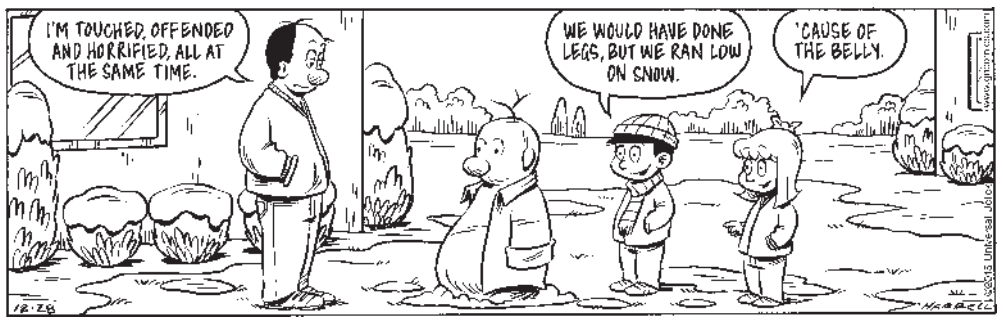

I HAVE 200 SNOWBALLS! I AM UTTERLY INVINCIBLE!
I CAN ACT WITH TOTAL IMPUNITY! I CAN DO WHATEVER I WANT!
SO JUST HANG ON WHILE I DECIDE WHAT THAT IS!
12/26

Garfield®

By Jim Davis

Adam@home

By Bryan Basset


I'M TOUCHED, OFFENDED AND HORRIFIED, ALL AT THE SAME TIME.
WE WOULD HAVE DONE LEGS, BUT WE RAN LOW ON SNOW.
'CAUSE OF THE BELLY.
12-28

The Duplex

By Glenn McCoy

Remember back when people gave Christmas presents instead of gift cards?
Are you going to talk or play?
Okay. Okay.
Remind me again. Do three Macy's gift cards beat two pair of Borders gift cards?
Dang! I'm shuffling next time!

CROSSWORD

By Eugene Sheffer

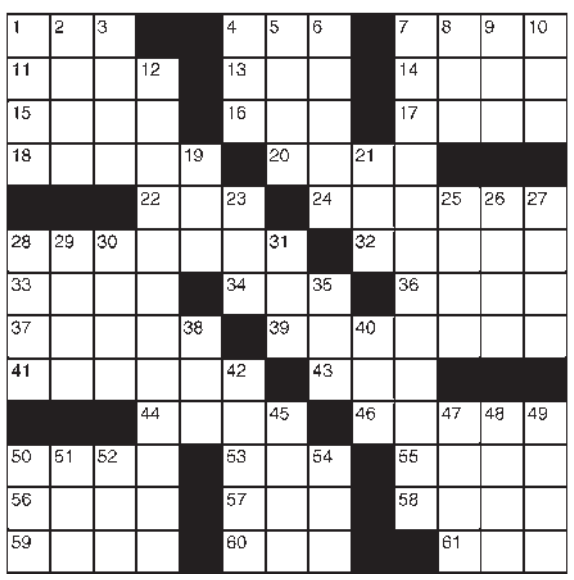
ACROSS
1 "Marvy!"
4 "Zip it!"
7 Possum of comics
11 River to the Baltic
13 Ode title starter
14 Cash advance
15 Dynamic leader?
16 Hon, to Andy Capp
17 Go up and down
18 High-IQ society
20 Meander
22 Finish
24 Shut down
28 007's cocktail
32 — -frutti ice cream
33 Memorial bio
34 Nile snake
36 "Gypsy" star Daly
37 "I do" setting
39 One with a short fuse
41 Quick TV promo
43 Armed conflict
44 Yogi Bear, e.g.
46 Date-night option
50 Greek liqueur
53 Messy eater's need
55 Unruffled
56 Prayer closer
57 "Green" prefix
58 Fuzzy fruit
59 Slowly vanish
60 Sun spot?
61 "— Kapital"

DOWN
1 Froth
2 Zip- — -doo-dah
3 Swiss capital
4 Gateway Arch city (Abbr.)
5 60 minutes
6 Mayhem
7 May-flower landing place
8 Odometer start
9 Merry
10 Artist Yoko
12 Inscribed hiero-glyphics "key"
19 Cuckoo
21 Cockpit fig.
23 Crime lab sample
25 Eyelid woe
26 Italian volcano
27 Lost power
28 Castle's trench
29 Adroit
30 Hayworth of "Pal Joey"
31 Suffix for sheep or bull
35 "Wham!"
38 Vintage Olds
40 Scot's topper
42 Judges wear them
45 Shaving mishap
47 Null and —
48 "State Fair" setting
49 Yale team
50 Lummox
51 Actress Thurman
52 British "Z"
54 "Whew!"

Solution time: 25 mins.

M	A	R	C	■	A	R	F	■	R	S	T	U
A	G	A	R	■	M	O	I	■	E	N	O	S
S	E	M	I	■	B	O	B	■	P	O	L	E
T	E	A	S	E	R	■	S	C	O	W	L	S
■	■	■	■	P	P	O	■	■	O	R	B	■
I	T	S	Y	■	S	N	O	W	T	I	R	E
C	E	N	■	■	■	F	I	■	■	R	A	N
S	N	O	W	B	A	■	L	■	H	O	T	V
■	■	■	W	E	B	■	■	S	L	O	■	■
R	E	J	E	C	T	■	T	A	H	I	T	I
A	R	O	D	■	O	N	O	■	O	M	A	N
G	A	B	E	■	S	U	V	■	H	U	C	K
U	S	S	R	■	S	T	E	■	O	P	T	S

Friday's answer 12-28



STUMPED? For answers to today's crossword, call **1-900-226-5955**! 99¢ per minute, touch-tone/rotary phones. (18+ only.) A King Features service, NYC.

CELEBRITIES BORN ON THIS DAY: Sienna Miller, 34; John Legend, 37; Seth Meyers, 42; Denzel Washington, 61.

Happy Birthday: It's time to bring about change, but before you get started, clear up unfinished business. Impulsiveness brought on by pressure must be avoided. Set your own pace and develop and strategize to your liking. Realize that you are capable of reaching your goals with or without the help of others. Take advantage of your good fortune and reach for the stars. Your numbers are 6, 14, 22, 25, 34, 41, 46.

ARIES (*March 21-April 19*): Consider your next move and do what's required to make it happen. Picking up another diploma or updating your resume to fit the current professional trends should be on your agenda. Greater stability should be your goal. ✪✪✪✪✪

TAURUS (*April 20-May 20*): Participating in events or related to work, colleagues and setting your sights on a higher position is encouraged. Discuss your plans and what you have to offer with someone in a position to help you reach your goal. ✪✪

GEMINI (*May 21-June 20*): You'll be tempted to get involved in a joint venture, but first consider what it will cost. Don't give the impression that you can foot the bill. Honesty will be necessary regarding what you are willing to contribute. Be practical and prudent. ✪✪✪✪

CANCER (*June 21-July 22*): You've got everything under control, so don't be tempted to make a change just because someone else is impulsive. Partnerships are favored, but only if you contribute equal amounts. Financial and real estate opportunities look promising. ✪✪✪

LEO (*July 23-Aug. 22*): You can bring about changes if you want to. Consider what your resolution for the new year is going to be, and begin early. Getting a head start will give you the momentum you need to make your dreams come true. ✪✪✪

VIRGO (*Aug. 23-Sept. 22*): Get out and make every encounter mean something. Participating in networking events and activities will help you set the stage for things to come. You don't have to wait until the new year to start anew. ✪✪✪

LIBRA (*Sept. 23-Oct. 22*): Take a moment to re-evaluate the year gone by. Consider what has been working for you and what hasn't. Check out your legal rights and your financial position to see what route will make your life better. ✪✪✪✪

SCORPIO (*Oct. 23-Nov. 21*): Discuss your plans and broaden your horizons. Call in favors and make positive changes at home that will ensure a better lifestyle and happier existence. Get back to what's truly important to you, and embrace life. ✪✪

SAGITTARIUS (*Nov. 22-Dec. 21*): Keep everything in perspective. If you try to expand your business too quickly or take on too much stress, you will end up putting more pressure on yourself. Any situation will be manageable if you are practical and moderate. ✪✪✪✪✪

EUGENIA LAST

THE LAST WORD IN ASTROLOGY

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CAPRICORN (*Dec. 22-Jan. 19*): Don't let the little things get to you. It's impossible to please everyone, so stop trying and focus more on doing what will bring you the highest rewards. It's your success that will make you happy. ✪✪✪

AQUARIUS (*Jan. 20-Feb. 18*): Plan to focus on your health, fitness and emotional well-being. Idle time will work against you, especially when dealing with someone you love. Less talk and more action will help you avoid an argument. Home improvements will turn out well. ✪✪✪

PISCES (*Feb. 19-March 20*): Opportunities will develop if you touch base with people you have worked with in the past. An old plan with an updated image will work if you can pull the right people together to make it happen. Old partnerships can be renewed. ✪✪✪

Birthday Baby: You are consistent, proactive and playful. You are strong-willed and resilient.

*Eugenia's website—**eugenialast.com**, Eugenia's android app @ **http://bit.ly/exhoro** and join Eugenia on **twitter/facebook/linkedin**.*

SUDOKU

Conceptis Sudoku *By Dave Green*

	7			5	2		3	
2					4			8
			6	8				
		2			6		8	4
8		4				7		6
7	3		9			5		
				6	3			
9			7					1
	2		4	1			5	

Difficulty Level ★ 12/28

Sudoku is a number-placing puzzle based on a 9x9 grid with several given numbers. The object is to place the numbers 1 to 9 in the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the same number only once. The difficulty level of the Conceptis Sudoku increases from Monday to Saturday.

Last Friday's SUDOKU Answer

6	9	2	1	4	3	5	8	7
5	8	3	6	2	7	1	4	9
1	7	4	9	8	5	3	6	2
3	5	9	2	7	4	8	1	6
8	4	6	3	1	9	7	2	5
2	1	7	5	6	8	9	3	4
9	6	5	8	3	2	4	7	1
4	2	8	7	5	1	6	9	3
7	3	1	4	9	6	2	5	8

Difficulty Level ★★★ 12/28

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WONDERWORD®

By DAVID OUELLET

HOW TO PLAY: All the words listed below appear in the puzzle — horizontally, vertically, diagonally and even backward. Find them, circle each letter of the word and strike it off the list. The leftover letters spell the **WONDERWORD.**

WES CRAVEN (1939-2015) Solution: 9 letters

F	C	D	B	R	E	E	D	E	S	R	U	C	S	M
R	O	R	R	O	H	O	S	S	L	L	I	H	I	T
E	M	A	E	L	G	S	C	L	D	O	O	M	Y	E
D	I	C	E	S	R	R	I	L	U	W	I	E	A	A
D	N	U	C	N	E	A	E	L	U	P	A	U	L	C
Y	G	L	L	A	O	R	E	L	G	O	O	G	A	H
S	O	A	M	M	R	Z	A	S	T	N	S	E	B	E
T	F	E	A	S	T	O	T	M	H	S	E	N	U	R
O	R	E	D	E	Y	E	L	H	T	O	A	E	N	E
N	A	H	T	A	N	O	J	I	G	H	C	C	K	L
E	G	S	O	S	H	A	R	O	N	I	G	K	A	L
J	E	S	S	I	C	Ⓐ	Ⓒ	Ⓣ	T	E	L	I	E	I
R	E	L	L	I	H	C	R	A	V	E	N	I	N	R
R	E	S	E	I	V	O	M	Y	E	L	S	E	W	H
E	T	K	R	U	E	G	E	R	E	P	P	I	R	T

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Act, Breed, Caroline, Castle, Chiller, Coming of Rage, Craven, Cursed, Dogs, Dracula, Earl, English, Eugene, Feast, Freddy, Google, Hills, Horror, Iya Labunka, Jessica, Jonathan, Krueger, Mimi, Mood, Movies, Nightmare, Ohio, Paul, Pulse, Redeye, Scream, Sharon, Shocker, Show, Soul, Stone, Teacher, Thriller, Tripper, Twilight Zone, Wesley

Last Friday's Answer: Sweet

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❖ (1) Accounting Supervisor
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Salary: $8.00 to $9.50 per hour

❖ (1) Accountant
Bachelor's Degree in Accountancy or equivalent. Have at least 2 to 4 years accounting work experience in a Hotel/Golf industry. Have knowledge of economic and accounting principles and practices, A/P, A/R, G/L, bank analysis and reporting of financial data. Excellent in mathematical and communication skills. Ability to maintain highly confidential nature of accounting works and possess professionalism with good manners and right conduct. Knowledge in different accounting software application must know how to operate Peachtree program and must be computer literate. Must be able to work under pressure, and meet deadlines. Willing to work in flexible shifts, in all weather condition, days, evenings weekends and holidays.
Salary: $6.50 to $8.00 per hour

❖ Front Desk Clerk
(1) Japanese Speaking ; (1) Korean Speaking ; (1) Chinese speaking
High School Diploma or equivalent. Have at least three months to one year of related work experienced. Knowledge of principle and processes for providing excellent personal and customer service skills. Including handling large group of arrivals. Excellent interpersonal skills with a positive attitude, professional, neat and well groomed at all times. Must be able to speak and understand English and preferably fluent in Korean language. Computer proficiency and email communication. Willing to work in flexible shifts, days, evenings, weekend and holidays and be able to stand for prolonged period of time.
Salary: $6.05 to $7.50 per hour

❖ Night Duty Manager
Bachelor's Degree in Hospitality, Business Management or equivalent. At least three to five years working experienced management level in a hotel industry. Knowledgeable in hotel night audit. Knowledge of principle and process for providing customer and personal services and interpret financial data like budgets and expenses reports. Requiring computer skills, mathematics and basic accounting. Speaking additional language like Japanese or Chinese and or Korean is an advantage. Knowledgeable in Hotel system like Fidelio and Opera is preferred but not required. Experienced in handling large group of arrivals. Acquired hospitality related program is asset. A "People Person". A d must be able to stand for a prolonged period of time.
Salary: $11.50 to $14.50 per hour

Suwaso Corporation would like to invite all qualified US workers to send their resume to hr.copspn@gmail.com or you can submit it to Coral Ocean Golf Resort, Human Resources Office not later than December 31, 2015 at 12:00 nn.

JOB VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT
AK TRAC Manager
Atkins Kroll is seeking an independent and outgoing individual who is looking for a dynamic career to fill the position of Toyota Rent a Car Manager. In this growth market the successful person will be responsible and accountable for the successful operation of the Toyota Rent a Car department.

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• 5-Liner	$24	$45

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Classified Ads

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Classified Ads

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Find today's solution in classified section

Lowly 76ers beat Suns 111-104 for 2nd win of season

PHOENIX (AP)— Ish Smith was just traded from New Orleans to Philadelphia, so he knows each win is special. And this one came against one of his former teams.

Smith scored 14 points in the first game of his second stint with the lowly 76ers, who beat the Phoenix Suns 111-104 on Saturday night for just their second win of the season.

"I didn't come from a situation where we were winning a lot in New Orleans, either," Smith said. "For me a win is a win and we have to keep coming closer together, through wins, through losses. If we do that, we will put us in a good position to win games."

Smith, who played 25 games for Philadelphia last season and averaged 12 points and six assists, got the start and was 6 for 15 from the floor. He was acquired in a trade with the Pelicans on Christmas Eve.

Isaiah Canaan scored 22 points and reserve Nik Stauskas had 17 for the 76ers, who went 12 for 27 from 3-point range. Carl Landry added 16 points, and Nerlens Noel added 14 points and 11 rebounds.

Philadelphia (2-30) snapped a 12-game losing streak with its first win since Dec. 1. The Sixers also stopped a 23-game road slide dating to last season.

The Suns lost leading scorer Eric Bledsoe to a sprained left knee in the first half. Coach Jeff Hornacek said Bledsoe had already left the arena for an MRI after the game but added team doctors didn't think it was a torn ACL.

Brandon Knight led Phoenix with 21 points. Rookie Devin Booker scored a career-high 19 points, and Jon Leuer had 14 points and nine rebounds. The Suns have lost four in a row and six of seven.

Bledsoe got hurt with 7:40 left in the second quarter and had to be helped to the locker room. He entered Saturday averaging 20.9 points and had four when he left the game.

"Said a little prayer for him and hope for the best," Suns guard Ronnie Price said. "Never like to see anyone going down on any side. Whatever it is, we'll be behind him and we'll support him through it."

The Sixers built a 16-point lead in the fourth quarter. The Suns got it down to a six-point deficit twice in the last two minutes, but Philadelphia was able to hang on.

Smith hit a 20-foot jumper for a 99-88 lead. He got a steal and fed Stauskas for a dunk, and knocked down an 18-footer to help keep the Sixers in front.

"Everybody can see how dynamic a player Ish is," Sixers coach Brett Brown said. "Giving a player of that caliber the ball at the end of the game was great for us."

Phoenix rallied in the second quarter after Bledsoe's injury, getting seven straight points from Booker to cut the Sixers' lead to 40-36. But the Suns got no closer before halftime despite Booker scoring 11 points in the quarter after not playing in the first.

The Suns took their first lead since a 2-0 advantage when Knight knocked down a 22-foot jumper to make it 60-58 in the third quarter.

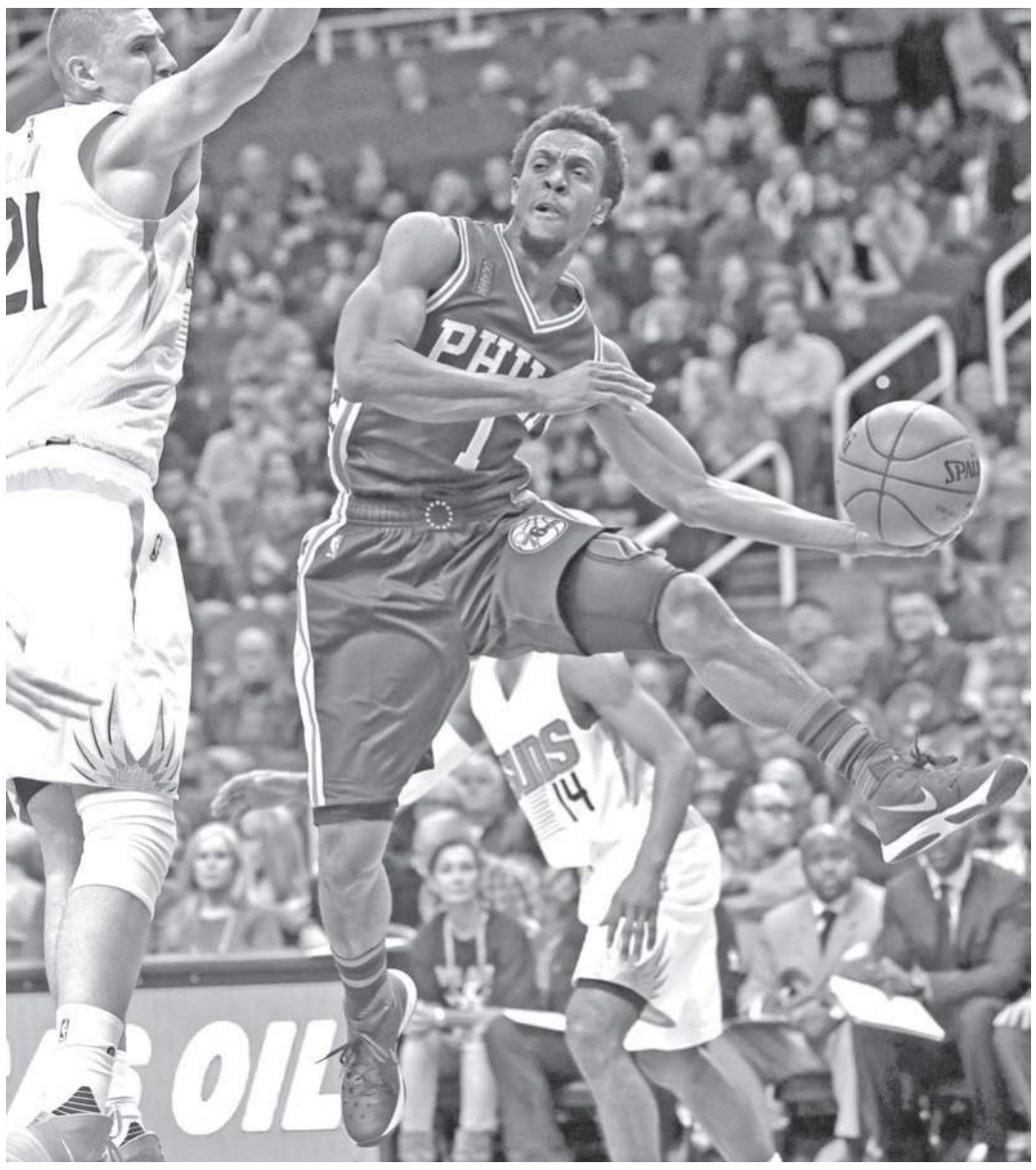
But Philadelphia reclaimed the lead behind Stauskas, who hit two key 3-pointers and a long jumper, the last bucket with 40 seconds left in the third. Kendall Marshall made a 3 with 0.9 seconds to go, giving the Sixers an 85-75 lead going into the fourth quarter.

The Suns (12-20) were left searching for answers after a loss to the team with the NBA's worst record.

"Obviously it's probably a low point for us," Hornacek said. "This last stretch I think we lost a little bit of confidence. We're going to keep working and try to get to the point where we're winning some of these games."

Forward P.J. Tucker said it was an embarrassing loss.

"We're just flat-out losing games and something's got to change real quick," he said.



AP

Philadelphia 76ers guard Ish Smith (1) passes around Phoenix Suns center Alex Len in the first quarter during an NBA basketball game, Saturday, Dec. 26, 2015, in Phoenix.

Trail Blazers 105, Cavaliers 76

In Portland, Ore., Allen Crabbe scored a career-high 26 points, and Portland held LeBron James to just 12 points.

Crabbe scored 21 in the first half, helping Portland (12-20) stop a five-game losing streak. He was 4 for 6 from 3-point range for the night.

C.J. McCollum had 16 points for the Trail Blazers, while Mason Plumlee had 11 points and 14 rebounds.

James missed his first four shots, had six points at halftime and didn't play in the fourth quarter. He matched his season-low scoring total.

Kevin Love had 13 points for Cleveland, which was coming off an 89-83 loss at Golden State on Christmas.

Mavericks 118, Bulls 111

In Dallas, J.J. Barea made a career-high seven 3-pointers and finished with 26 points coming off his first 30-point game, powering the Mavericks to the win.

Derrick Rose led the Bulls with 25 points, including nine in the fourth quarter, but had a key turnover before getting called for a 5-second violation when Chicago had a chance to tie in the final 11 seconds.

Dirk Nowitzki scored 16 points in his first home game since passing Shaquille O'Neal on the career scoring list, and Zaza Pachulia had 17 points and 12 rebounds. Barea was 7 for 8 from beyond the arc.

Nikola Mirotic had 23 points, seven rebounds and three blocks for the Bulls, who were trying for back-to-back wins a night after winning at Oklahoma City.

Clippers 109, Jazz 104

In Sal Lake City, playing without an injured Blake Griffin, J.J. Redick scored 25 points and Paul Pierce had 20 to lead the Clippers to the road victory.

The Clippers learned before the game that Griffin, their leading scorer, had a partially torn left quadriceps tendon and is expected to miss at least two weeks.

Chris Paul scored 19 points and DeAndre Jordan added 14 points and 13 rebounds for the Clippers, who won their second straight game after losing three in a row.

Gordon Hayward scored 28 points for Utah.

Pelicans 110, Rockets 108

In New Orleans, Anthony Davis had 24 points, 13 rebounds and three blocked shots for New Orleans, and Tyreke Evans stole Trevor Ariza's inbounds pass in the final seconds.

Eric Gordon scored 26 for the Pelicans, hitting six 3-pointers as New Orleans shot 13 of 24 from long range. Ryan Anderson scored 16, and Evans finished with 11 points and 13 assists.

James Harden scored 25 points for Houston. His final basket was a 3 that tied it at 108 with 2:27 left.

Ariza and Patrick Beverley each had 16 points for Houston.

Right after Harden's tying 3, Davis dunked an alley-oop lob from Evans, and neither team scored during the last 2 minutes.

Wizards 111, Nets 96

In New York, John Wall had 22 points and 13 assists, Marcin Gortat scored 25 points, and Washington earned its fourth straight victory.

Rookie Jarell Eddie made four 3-pointers and scored 12 points in the fourth quarter of his NBA debut, helping the Wizards blow open what was a two-point game after three. Washington (14-14), despite a number of injuries, is back at .500 for the first time since it was 6-6 a month ago.

Brook Lopez had 19 points and 11 rebounds for the Nets, who lost their sixth straight home game. Thaddeus Young finished with 16 points and 14 boards.

Hawks 117, Knicks 98

In Atlanta, Paul Millsap scored 22 points, Al Horford added 19 points and Atlanta won its sixth straight game.

Carmelo Anthony, returning after missing one game with a sprained right ankle, finished with 18 points and 12 rebounds for the Knicks. New York has dropped three straight and seven of 11.

Atlanta trailed by 15 midway through the first quarter and was down 14 late in the third before blowing past the Knicks to take a 20-point lead on Thabo Sefolosha's three-point play early in the fourth.

Mike Scott had a season-high 18 points for the Hawks.

Spurs 101, Nuggets 86

In San Antonio, Kawhi Leonard had 20 points, and the Spurs rebounded from a rare loss.

San Antonio extended its franchise record for consecutive wins at home to 26, including a record 17 straight to open this season.

LaMarcus Aldridge had 12 points and nine rebounds for the Spurs, and Boris Diaw had 16 points.

Denver's Nikola Jokic scored 22 points on 10-for-19 shooting.

Hornets 98, Grizzlies 92

In Charlotte, N.C., Kemba Walker scored 11 of his 22 points in the fourth quarter, and Charlotte held on for the victory.

Nicolas Batum had 20 points and 11 rebounds for the Hornets, who trailed 81-76 early in the final period. P.J. Hairston added 14 points, and Jeremy Lin had 13.

Mike Conley scored 19 points for Memphis, and Marc Gasol had 18. Zach Randolph added a double-double with 18 points and 12 rebounds.

Charlotte fought back to take the lead for good at 89-88 on a layup by Walker with 1:55 left.

Heat 108, Magic 101

In Orlando, Fla., Dwyane Wade and Chris Bosh each scored 24 points, leading Miami to the victory.

Goran Dragic added 22 points as Miami won for the third time in four games, including a 94-88 overtime victory against New Orleans on Christmas. Gerald Green scored 15 points, and Bosh also had 10 rebounds.

Orlando led 76-69 after three, but Wade fueled Miami's rally with 12 points in the fourth. The Heat outscored the Magic 39-25 in the final period.

Nik Vucevic led Orlando with 22 points and 10 rebounds. Elfrid Payton added 18 points and seven assists.

Celtics 99, Pistons 93

In Auburn Hills, Mich., Avery Bradley scored 18 points, Isaiah Thomas had 17 points and nine assists, and the Celtics got the win on the road.

Each of Boston's starters scored in double figures, and reserve Evan Turner added 13 points.

Detroit pulled within five in the last minute, and Turner was called for an offensive foul with 36 seconds left. Reggie Jackson's 3-pointer then trimmed Boston's lead to 95-93, but former Piston Jonas Jerebko hit a baseline jumper with 10.7 seconds left.

Pistons center Andre Drummond had 22 points and 22 rebounds for his fifth 20-20 game of the season.

Raptors 111, Bucks 90

In Milwaukee, DeMar DeRozan scored 22 points and Terrence Ross had 21, leading Toronto to the road win.

Luis Scola had 17 points and 11 rebounds for the Raptors, and Bismack Biyombo added 14 points and 12 rebounds. DeMarre Carroll, who missed the last nine games with a bruised right knee, scored seven points as Toronto won its third straight over Milwaukee.

After the Bucks took a slim lead late in the third quarter, the Raptors made eight 3-pointers — most were wide-open looks — and closed the game with seven straight for their final 21 points.

Khris Middleton scored 20 points and Greg Monroe added 16 for Milwaukee.

Pacers 102, Timberwolves 88

In Minneapolis, Monta Ellis had 22 points and six rebounds to help the Pacers rally for the victory.

Paul George scored 18 points on 7-of-16 shooting for Indiana, and reserve Jordan Hill scored 12 points. The Pacers snapped a three-game skid.

Karl-Anthony Towns had 24 points and eight rebounds for Minnesota, which has lost three in a row. Ricky Rubio finished with 15 points, nine assists and five rebounds.

Indiana, the league's fourth-best 3-point shooting team, was 3 of 17 on 3s through three quarters before hitting 6 of 9 in the fourth.

Kirk Cousins throws 4 TD passes, Redskins beat Eagles, 38-24

PHILADELPHIA (AP)—Wearing his "NFC East Champions" hat, Kirk Cousins made sure he got the last word.

Cousins finished his news conference, turned on his way out and screamed: "How many of y'all picked us to win the division?" It sounded like his "You like that?" rant two months ago.

The Washington Redskins are division champions, thanks to Cousins and his right arm.

Cousins threw four touchdown passes and had a season-high 365 yards and the Redskins beat the Philadelphia Eagles 38-24 on Saturday night to win their first division title in three years, completing a worst-to-first season.

"This is the most satisfied I've been as a player," Cousins said. "It's a big accomplishment. Now we need to build from here."

Only 4-12 in 2014, the Redskins (8-7) began their turnaround when Cousins rallied them from a 24-0 first-half deficit to a 31-30 win over Tampa Bay on Oct. 25. After that game, he yelled at reporters: "You like that?" It's become a rallying cry for the Redskins and their fans, who continued the chant for several minutes after the game.

"We felt like we were an up-and-coming football team and could compete with anyone," coach Jay Gruden said.

The Redskins have won three straight for the first time since a seven-game winning streak helped them secure the division in 2012 in Robert Griffin III's rookie year.

DeAngelo Hall returned DeMarco Murray's fumble 17 yards for a momentum-changing TD in the third quarter. Cousins threw TD passes to Chris Thompson and Pierre Garcon and a pair to Jordan Reed.

The Eagles (6-9) entered the game in control of their playoff hopes. They needed to beat the Redskins and Giants next week to win the East. Washington's win also eliminated New York (6-8).

"I think we're good enough," Coach Chip Kelly said. "We just have to put them in better position to make plays. It's 100 percent on my shoulders. It's unacceptable."

Two teams have clinched division crowns in Philadelphia in six days. Arizona won the NFC West with a 40-17 win over the Eagles last Sunday night.

While the Redskins head to the playoffs, the Eagles and Kelly face a challenging offseason. Kelly took control of personnel decisions last year and overhauled a team that went 10-6 in each of his first two seasons.

AP

Washington Redskins' Pierre Thomas (39) is tackled by Philadelphia Eagles' Ed Reynolds (30) and Kiko Alonso (50) in the second half of an NFL football game, Saturday, Dec. 26, 2015, in Philadelphia. (AP Photo/Michael Perez)

It clearly didn't work out.

Meanwhile, Gruden made a gutsy call in August to bench Griffin and give the starting job to Cousins.

It paid off.

Cousins was outstanding down the stretch with 16 TD passes and only two interceptions in the last seven games. He showed resolve after a mental blunder at the end of the first half cost the Redskins at least three points.

Cousins took a knee with no time-outs and 6 seconds left from the Eagles 6 with a 16-10 lead. He realized his mistake and tried to spike the ball, but the clock ran out. He made up for it in the second half.

"I'm very proud of Kirk," Gruden said. "He came in and kept his composure just like he has all year. Put his nose to the grindstone."

Cousins tossed a 12-yard touchdown pass to Thompson to give Washington a 23-10 lead. He converted three third-down passes on the series after Jaylen Watkins dropped an interception.

The Eagles answered quickly as Murray ran in from the 4 to cut it to 23-17.

But Murray then dropped a pitch, Hall picked it up and ran it back for a 30-17 lead late in the third quarter.

"I can't take my eyes off it," Murray said. "It was my fault."

The Eagles missed a chance to take the lead early in the second quarter when Sam Bradford overthrew a wide-open Zach Ertz on third-and-9. It would've been a 60-yard TD.

They missed another opportunity on the following series when Nelson Agholor dropped a 28-yard TD pass and settled for Caleb Sturgis' 34-yard field goal that cut it to 13-10.

After going three-and-out on their first possession, the Redskins scored touchdowns on the next two. Cousins connected with Reed over the middle on a 22-yard scoring pass to cut it to 7-6. Dustin Hopkins missed the extra point wide left.

Cousins then hit Reed over the middle again for a 12-yard TD pass and a 13-7 lead.

Peyton Manning strongly denies report he used HGH in 2011

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. (AP)—Peyton Manning strongly denied a report set to air on Al Jazeera that contends the Denver Broncos quarterback received human growth hormone through his wife during his recovery from neck fusion surgeries in 2011 in Indianapolis.

In a statement Saturday night, Manning said: "The allegation that I would do something like that is complete garbage and is totally made up. It never happened. Never."

He added, "I really can't believe somebody would put something like this on the air. Whoever said this is making stuff up."

The allegations surfaced in an Al Jazeera undercover probe into doping in global sports that is set to air Sunday and was shared in advance with the Huffington Post.

The report claims Manning received HGH from an Indianapolis anti-aging clinic in 2011 while he was still with the Colts. It said the drug, which was banned by the NFL in the 2011 collective bargaining agreement, was delivered to his wife, Ashley, so that the quarterback's name was never attached to the shipments.

Liam Collins, a British hurdler, went undercover and spoke with Charlie Sly, an Austin, Texas-based pharmacist who worked at the Guyer Institute, the Indiana-based anti-aging clinic in 2011. Sly allegedly names Manning and other high profile athletes as having received HGH from the clinic.

However, Sly backtracks in a subsequent statement to Al Jazeera, saying Collins secretly recorded his conversations without his knowledge or consent.

"The statements on any recordings or communications that Al Jazeera plans to air are absolutely false and incorrect," Sly said. "To be clear, I am recanting any such statements and there is no truth to any statement of mine that Al Jazeera plans to air. Under no circumstances should any of those recordings, statements or communications be aired."

The NFL and players union added human growth hormone testing to the collective bargaining agreement signed in 2011 but the side didn't agree to testing terms until 2014. Nobody has tested positive, which would trigger a four-game suspension.

Manning, who joined the Broncos in 2012, has been sidelined since Nov. 15 by a left foot injury. Brock Osweiler makes his sixth consecutive start in Manning's place Monday night when the Broncos (10-4) host the Bengals (11-3).

Raiders beat Chargers 23-20 in OT in possible Oakland finale

OAKLAND, Calif. (AP)—Philip Rivers' last pass fell incomplete near Charles Woodson's feet and the celebration began. Woodson got a Gatorade shower and then led the fans in a chant of "Rai-ders! Rai-ders!"

What was Woodson's final game in Oakland—and might have been the last for the Raiders as well—was far from pretty but it ended in a victory.

Sebastian Janikowski kicked a 31-yard field goal in overtime and the Raiders got a defensive stop to seal a 23-20 victory over the San Diego Chargers on Thursday night.

"I guess it had to end like that," Woodson said. "It was a little much for me. I would have rather it had been a lopsided victory and we blew them out. That's the way it goes sometimes."

Derek Carr threw a touchdown pass and led the winning overtime drive for the Raiders (7-8), who could be moving to the Los Angeles area after the season. It also made Woodson a winner in his final home game with the Raiders before retiring after his 18th NFL season.

"This is my last game in the Coliseum but just know I'll never leave you," Woodson told the crowd. "Go Raiders!"

The Raiders won despite 15 penalties, including five on their overtime drive, and being held to one first down of the second half on a 3-yard touchdown drive.

But Oakland did move the ball in overtime after winning the toss. Three straight penalties left the Raiders with a second-and-29 but San Diego's Denzel Perryman bailed them out when he was called for a personal foul for hitting a defenseless Michael Crabtree in the head.

Seth Roberts then made a juggling 33-yard catch and run to put the Raiders on the 10. After Woodson lost 3 yards on a reverse when San Diego covered a possible pass to Carr in the end zone, Janikowski hit the go-ahead field goal.

"Charles is one of the greatest players to ever put on a uniform," coach Jack Del Rio said. "He's a great Raider. To be able to send him out the right way, to be able to cap off a special evening like this, our last home game of the year ... I'm just really proud of the effort."

The Chargers (4-11) were unable to muster a first down and lost their seventh straight division game. Rivers threw for 277 yards and a TD for San Diego, also possibly on the move to the Los Angeles area.

"It's been the story of the year, just losing close games," Rivers said. "Doesn't make it any easier losing another one like that."

The Raiders had done nothing offensively for most of the night when the defense gave them a needed spark. Malcolm Smith forced a fumble on a catch by David Johnson, and Benson Mayowa returned it 41 yards to the 3.

Carr hit Crabtree on the next play for the go-ahead touchdown with 4:42 to go. Carr added a 2-point conversion to Roberts to make it 20-17.

The Chargers tied it on Josh Lambo's 47-yard field goal with 55 seconds to play.

It was a night of goodbyes as Woodson played his final home game with the Raiders after announcing his retirement earlier in the week. Woodson got a loud ovation as he was introduced last with the defensive starters and was the only Oakland captain for the pregame coin toss.

While Woodson's future is determined, the team's remains in flux. Raiders owner Mark Davis and Chargers owner Dean Spanos are seeking to partner on building a stadium in Carson. The Rams are looking to build their own stadium in Inglewood as well and the league will likely decide in January which teams—if any—will be allowed to move.

Some fans came with "Stay in Oakland" signs in hopes that the team does not leave the Bay Area for the second time. The Raiders moved from Oakland to Los Angeles following the 1981 season and then returned in 1995.

The Raiders hardly provided a memorable game if this was the Oakland finale as both offenses struggled for much of the game. The third quarter was particularly bad with the teams combining for seven punts and one safety when Denico Autry sacked Rivers in the end zone on eight drives.

The sloppy play continued in the fourth quarter when San Diego was called for unsportsmanlike conduct after an incomplete pass on third down. That backed the Chargers to the 35 but Lambo made a 53-yard field goal.

Oakland's Khalil Mack was called for holding on the play and Chargers coach Mike McCoy opted to take the penalty instead of the three points. That seemed to pay off when Rivers appeared to hit Ladarius Green for a 30-yard touchdown pass on the next play. But the catch was wiped out on replay review and Lambo eventually missed a 48-yard field goal, keeping the Chargers lead at 17-12.

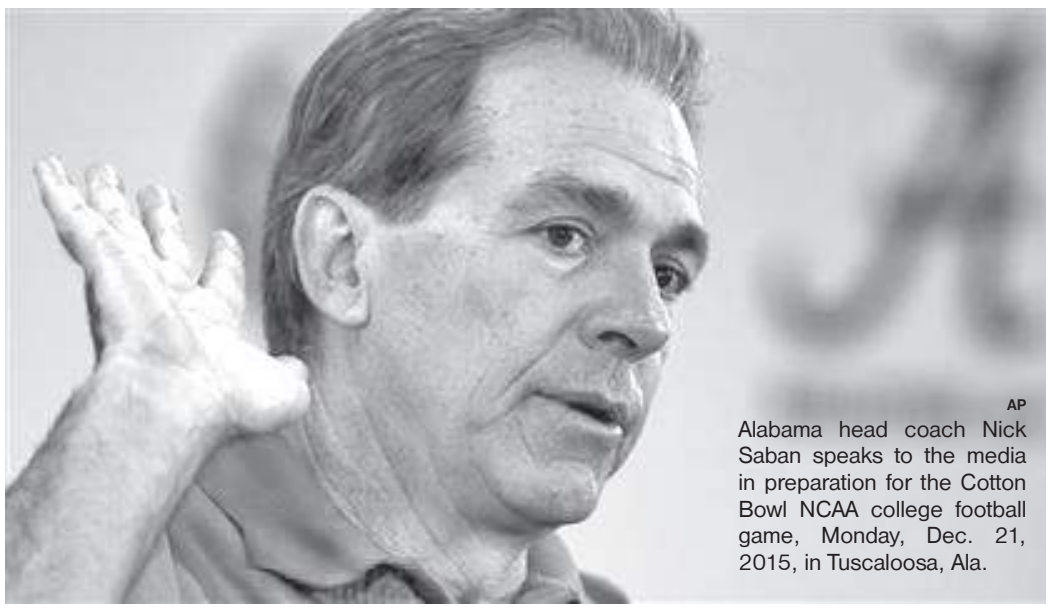
Saban's growing coaching tree joins titles as part of legacy

TUSCALOOSA, Ala. (AP)— Nick Saban's coaching legacy extends well beyond the Southeastern Conference and national championships and NFL draft picks. It sometimes stretches all the way to the opposing sidelines, in fact.

No. 2 Alabama's 64-year-old coach now has former underlings leading three SEC East schools and, coincidentally, the Crimson Tide's semifinal opponent, No. 3 Michigan State. Another, Florida State's Jimbo Fisher, won a national title in 2013.

Longtime Tide defensive coordinator Kirby Smart recently joined the club after taking over alma mater Georgia a day after the SEC championship game win over Florida and ex-Alabama offensive chief Jim McElwain.

"I think the growth you get from working at a place like Alabama and with a program under Nick Saban, it helps me immensely," said Smart, who's running Alabama's defense through the playoffs. "A lot of people have said why not take a smaller school head job? I honestly feel my growth was better being in a large program, being around coach Saban and learning how to manage a lot of the tough situations you deal with in the media."



AP

Alabama head coach Nick Saban speaks to the media in preparation for the Cotton Bowl NCAA college football game, Monday, Dec. 21, 2015, in Tuscaloosa, Ala.

Clearly there are benefits to working for the demanding Saban, beyond even the big salaries. Smart was making $1.5 million a year.

The same day he was introduced, South Carolina trotted out its new hire, former Saban assistant Will Muschamp. The two erstwhile defensive coordinators are each making more than $3 million annually.

Working for Saban clearly can pay off bigtime for his top assistants. McElwain was SEC coach of the year in his debut season at Florida, winning the East after returning to the league following a stint as Colorado State head coach. He was offensive coordinator of two Tide national championship teams.

Saban hired Muschamp away from Division II Valdosta State at LSU in 2001, and the ex-Florida coach is on his second stint as an SEC East head man. Muschamp was Auburn's defensive coordinator last season, facing his former boss in the regular season finale.

"I wouldn't be standing here if it weren't for the opportunities he gave me a long time ago at LSU," Muschamp said before the Iron Bowl.

Saban also hired Mark Dantonio at Michigan State, where the Spartans head man worked as his secondary coach from 1995-99. Now, the two will face off with a national championship shot on the line.

Saban, who has lavished praise on Dantonio's performance leading that program, is careful not to take too much credit when asked if he takes pride when his assistants land head coaching jobs.

"I'm happy for them. I'm happy for their families," Saban said. "I'm happy and have a tremendous amount of respect for the great job that they did for long time in helping our program be successful. One of the reasons they've worked is because of the goals and aspirations that they had, so you're very, very proud for them that they now have an opportunity that they worked so hard for."

Sports groups asked to submit annual report

Northern Marianas Sports Association president Michael White is calling all member federations to submit their annual report no later than Jan. 21.

"Please submit your federation's annual report for 2015. The report doesn't need to be longer than one or two pages. Send me two or three (electronic) photos if you have them. These reports will be edited and submitted to ONOC for inclusion in its annual report," White said in an email circulated to NMSA members.

NMSA is an associate member of Oceania National Olympic Committee, which publishes highlights of each member countries in its annual report.

"I would like to see every federation's report in this year's ONOC Annual Report. Your report will help NMSA show ONOC and its member federations that we are a responsible and worthy member of the Pacific sports community. Each federation can review what others have accomplished during the year, and hopefully take out some good ideas. Additionally, your own report is a good assessment tool to help your federation see what it has done well, and what it needs to do to improve," White said.

Each federation's report is expected to feature events that took place in the first three quarters of the year, as there were limited tournaments in the last quarter after Saipan was hit by Typhoon Soudelor.

Northern Mariana Islands Tennis Association and Northern Mariana Islands Football Association, two of the most active sports group in the CNMI, are likely to highlight their participation in off-island tournaments in their respective annual reports. NMITA may mention the CNMI junior team's dominance in the North Pacific Regional Championships and stint in the Pacific Oceania Junior Championships, while NMIFA's report may contain information on teams that represented the Commonwealth to Asian Football Confederation and East Asian Football Federation-sanctioned competitions.

(Roselyn B. Monroyo)

JOETEN

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Angelo Fernando and Naks Gonacao combined for 11 first-quarter points to back up Capalad and help MBI/KFC keep the double-digit spread, 28-17, going into the second canto.

However, MBI/KFC squandered the twin-digit advantage in the second frame, as Juanito Sambile and Dixon Kwon fired up and brought Joeten back into the match. The duo scored Joeten's first 19 points, while Sidney Quan and Steve Rasa drilled the last two field goals, moving Joeten within 4 at the break, 40-44.

Joeten continued its uphill climb and successfully stole the upper hand from MBI/KFC in the third, 70-67. Kwon was still on target, adding 8 more points. Rasa and Alex Lauron matched Kwon's production in the third to lift Joeten to a 3-point lead, entering the final canto.

Lauron picked up where he left off early in the fourth quarter, tallying 5 of Joeten's first 7 points to keep their distance against MBI/KFC, while Kwon finished off their foe by canning four important free throws in the homestretch.

Kwon emerged as the leading scorer in the game with his 30 markers, while Lauron chipped in 19. Sambile and Rasa also had double figures, contributing 16 and 14, respectively.

Capalad paced MBI/KFC with his 24 points, but he was held to two field goals in the second half.

All-Star game

Meanwhile, the JP caging will hold an All-Star game tonight at 7pm, while waiting for the final playoff pairings.

Two to three players from each participating squad were selected to play on the red and blue teams. The red squad is composed of CUC's James Benavente and George Poquiz, Joeten's Lauron, Quan, and Kwon, MBI/KFC's Ivan Devero, Perry Inos and Fernando, and Docomo's Robert Sanciangco and Tony Diaz. Tan Holding's Elmer Esdrelon and Matt Duenas will lead the blue squad, which also has McDonald's Gil Gapor and McClain Achas, Saipan Ice's Treat Kaipat and Derrick Rangamar, Top Development, Inc.'s Nestor Arreza and Raymond Velasco, and Mariana Resort's Fred Litulumar and June Fidelino.

A 3-point shootout, featuring one player from each squad, will also take place during the halftime break of the All-Star match.

Joeten 89 – Kwon 30, Lauron 19, Sambile 16, Rasa 14, Quan 6, Tobias 4.

MBI/KFC 82 – Capalad 24, Fernando 19, Devero 13, Gonacao 12, Inos 9, Omampo 5.

Scoring by quarters: 17-28, 40-44, 70-67, 89-82.

GMJ/IKKI

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in the second quarter with Rodney Catalla hitting back-to-back triples to spark an 8-0 spurt. The surge allowed Erika's/Ferrera to turn a 20-16 advantage to a 12-point lead. Erika's/Ferrera threatened to pull away despite having only six players in the first half.

With the match slowly slipping away from its hands, GMI/IKKI sued for time and then unloaded a 14-0 bomb to regain the upper hand, 30-28. It was a close game from thereon and the opposing squads were back to square one at halftime, 44-44.

At the resumption of the match, the depleted Erika's/Ferrera again surprised GMI/IKKI to reestablish a double-digit lead, entering the final canto. Melvin Villarin and Danny Illahi teamed up in Erika's/Ferrera' 31-point explosion in the third quarter, combining for 19 markers

Villarin also scored Erika's/Ferrera's first point in the fourth frame off a split free throw, but he was held to two field goals the rest of the way, while Illahi was limited to one basket. The entire Erika's/Ferrera team made only four field goals and was outgunned by Sedillo and Marlon Binuya, 15-13.

Sedillo and Binuya were among the six GMI/IKKI players who logged double figures for the team, finishing with 10 and 14, respectively. Allison Dizon also recorded 14 markers, Jun Pantaleon chipped in 11, and Joseph Galulu and Dennis Cortez added 10 apiece.

Catalla led all scorers with his 23 points, while Villarin contributed 13.

Meanwhile, regular season champion MJD Enterprise dueled CES Electronic in the other win-or-go-home match last Saturday and results of that playoff match will be reported in *Saipan Tribune*'s Tuesday issue. The winner will face GMI/IKKI in the semifinals.

GMI/IKKI 90 – Binuya 14, Dizon 14, Pantaleon 11, Sedillo 10, Galulu 10, Cortez 10, Sison 9, Demapan 3, Montes 3.

Erika's/Ferrera 88 – Catalla 23, Villarin 21, Illahi 13, Fernandez 8, De Belen 5, Manabat 4, Tabora 2.

Scoring by quarters: 16-20, 44-44, 65-75, 90-88.

LITTLE

From Page 28

year's CNMI district tournament.

"Tinian will host the district tournament and Mayor [Joey Patrick] San Nicolas knows that we should start selection of the board. Their field also needs some repairs after it got damaged by Typhoon Champi," said Ada.

The DA's office is also tasked to explain to the Saipan, Tinian, and Rota Little League boards of the new age alignment that is set to take effect in 2018.

The DA rules committee approved the changes and the Little League headquarters ratified the recommendation made by the DAs in their last congress this year.

Ada said from May 31, the age alignment is moved back to Aug. 31 to make the Little League a true baseball program for U12 players and putting 13-year-olds to another age group.

The Majors will have 9-12 year-olds, the 50-70 is between 11-13, the 13-14 age group are for the Juniors, 15-16 are Seniors, and the Big League are for 16 to 18 years old.

The DAs also voted that all rule changes will be made every four years instead of three.

TRIBUNE SPORTS SCORES

NBA STANDINGS

EASTERN CONFERENCE

Atlantic Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Toronto	19	12	.613	—
Boston	17	13	.567	1½
New York	14	17	.452	5
Brooklyn	8	22	.267	10½
Philadelphia	2	30	.063	17½

Southeast Division

Atlanta	20	12	.625	—
Miami	18	11	.621	½
Orlando	17	13	.567	2
Charlotte	16	13	.552	2½
Washington	14	14	.500	4

Central Division

Cleveland	19	9	.679	—
Indiana	17	12	.586	2½
Chicago	16	12	.571	3
Detroit	17	14	.548	3½
Milwaukee	12	19	.387	8½

WESTERN CONFERENCE

Southwest Division

San Antonio	26	6	.813	—
Dallas	17	13	.567	8
Memphis	16	16	.500	10
Houston	16	16	.500	10
New Orleans	10	20	.333	15

Northwest Division

Oklahoma City	20	10	.667	—
Utah	12	16	.429	7
Denver	12	18	.400	8
Portland	12	20	.375	9
Minnesota	11	19	.367	9

Pacific Division

Golden State	28	1	.966	—
L.A. Clippers	18	13	.581	11
Sacramento	12	17	.414	16
Phoenix	12	20	.375	17½
L.A. Lakers	5	25	.167	23½

NFL STANDINGS

AMERICAN CONFERENCE

East

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
y-New England	12	2	0	.857	435	269
N.Y. Jets	9	5	0	.643	344	272
Buffalo	6	8	0	.429	341	336
Miami	5	9	0	.357	278	361

South

Houston	7	7	0	.500	275	301
Indianapolis	6	8	0	.429	285	372
Jacksonville	5	9	0	.357	343	380
Tennessee	3	11	0	.214	269	359

North

x-Cincinnati	11	3	0	.786	378	243
Pittsburgh	9	5	0	.643	378	287
Baltimore	4	10	0	.286	292	360
Cleveland	3	11	0	.214	253	387

West

Denver	10	4	0	.714	308	259
Kansas City	9	5	0	.643	365	257
Oakland	7	8	0	.467	342	376
San Diego	4	11	0	.267	300	371

NATIONAL CONFERENCE

East

Washington	8	7	0	.533	354	356
N.Y. Giants	6	8	0	.429	373	358
Philadelphia	6	9	0	.400	342	400
Dallas	4	10	0	.286	246	324

South

y-Carolina	14	0	0	1.000	449	278
Atlanta	7	7	0	.500	302	312
Tampa Bay	6	8	0	.429	311	353
New Orleans	5	9	0	.357	350	432

North

x-Green Bay	10	4	0	.714	347	265
Minnesota	9	5	0	.643	296	272
Detroit	5	9	0	.357	302	363
Chicago	5	9	0	.357	289	352

West

y-Arizona	12	2	0	.857	445	269
x-Seattle	9	5	0	.643	370	248
St. Louis	6	8	0	.429	241	294
San Francisco	4	10	0	.286	202	339

BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

2015 NMIFA U12 Interscholastic Football League Winners

PHOTOS By ROSELYN B. MONROYO

Merrick Toves, center, poses with NMIFA staff Jershwin Angeles, left, and tournament volunteer Reniel Relucio after receiving the Golden Boot trophy during the awards ceremony for the 2015 NMIFA U12 Interscholastic Football League this month at the Hopwood Junior High School Field.

Gregorio T. Camacho Elementary School's Jannah Casarino takes the Golden Boot trophy.

San Antonio Middle School players smile after getting their fourth place trophy.

Hopwood Junior High School players pose with their third place trophy.

William S. Reyes Elementary School players and coaches gather for a photo after bagging the third place trophy.

Gregorio T. Camacho Elementary School coach Tawny Barcinas, right, joins her players for a group photo after winning the fourth place trophy.

Hopwood 2's Therize Millare, center, shows her Golden Glove award.

William S. Reyes Elementary School's Oliver Fajardo, center, is happy to bring home the Golden Boot award.

Mt. Carmel School players and team officials pose for a group photo after taking the runner-up trophy.

San Antonio Middle School players and their coach Dong Hwun Kim, standing left, win the runner-up trophy in the girls division.

Lowly 76ers beat Suns 111-104 for 2nd win of season

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Saipan Tribune
Sports

Kirk Cousins throws 4 TD passes, Redskins beat Eagles, 38-24

PAGE 25

GMJ/IKKI gains semis entry in masters

By ROSELYN B. MONROYO
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REPORTER

GMI Wholesale/IKKI avoided Erika Catering/Ferrera Builders' upset axe after eking out 90-88 victory in their playoff match in the masters division of the 2015 San Antonio Community Action Network Basketball League last Saturday night at the San Antonio court.

GMI Wholesale/IKKI stole the win and the semis berth that goes with it after overhauling a 4-point deficit in the last minute and change of the match and capitalizing on Erika's/Ferrera's errors and missed foul shots.

Erika's/Ferrera was still on top, 84-80, with less than a minute left in the game when GMI/IKKI launched a short 6-0 run capped by Fradel Sedillo's breakaway layup off a steal from Art Montes to grab the driver's seat, 86-84. Sedillo later also had a crucial steal, which he converted to another layup that sealed the deal for GMI/IKKI, 90-86. Erika's/Ferrera failed to take the lead back in the homestretch as it went 2-for-6 from the free throw area besides turning the ball over twice in the crucial stage of the match. Erika's/Ferrera collapsed in the end, as it ran out of timeout and an opportunity to reorganize against a GMI/IKKI fightback.

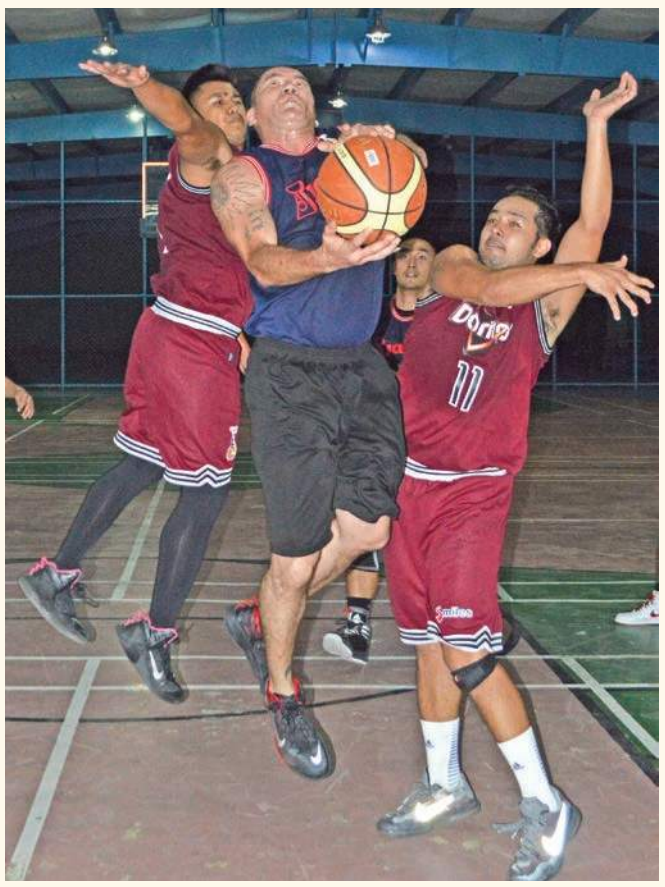
It was a sorry loss for fifth-ranked Erika's/Ferrera, which tasted the biggest lead in the match, 28-16, and was still ahead by double figures at the end of the third canto, 75-65, before Sedillo and company regrouped and pull off the come-from-behind win.

Erika's/Ferrera stunned the fourth-seeded GMI/IKKI early

See GMJ/IKKI on Page 26

ROSELYN B. MONROYO
GMJ Wholesale/IKKI's Joseph Galulu takes off for a running jumper in front of Erika's Catering/Ferrera Builders' Dante Tabora during the second quarter of their playoff game in the masters division of the San Antonio caging last Saturday at the San Antonio court.

Joeten spoils MBI/KFC's bid for sweep



ROSELYN B. MONROYO
Joeten's Steve Rasa, center, slices the defense of MBI/KFC's Ivan Devero, left, and Perry Inos during the second quarter of their game in the JP World caging last Wednesday at the Gillette Multipurpose Gymnasium.

By ROSELYN B. MONROYO
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REPORTER

Joeten denied MBI/KFC a regular season sweep after pulling off an 89-82 win in the final game in the elimination round of the 2nd JP World Corp. Customer Appreciation Basketball League last Wednesday night at the Gillette Multipurpose Gymnasium.

With the victory, Joeten and MBI/KFC ended up in a three-way tie for first place with Tan Holdings. The three teams finished the round-robin regular season with similar 7-1 records and league organizers have yet to announce how to break the deadlock. The winner of the No. 1 spot in the nine-team field has an advantage in the next round, as the top finisher will face the last-ranked squad in the playoffs.

Joeten managed to hand MBI/KFC its lone loss in the elimination after working its way back from a 13-point deficit in the first quarter.

MBI/KFC led by as much as 13 late in the opening canto, 28-15, behind the 11 points of White Capalad, who waxed hot early, knocking in 8 of the team's first 10 points, including back-to-back triples.

See JOETEN on Page 26

Little League vets to help Ada

By JON PEREZ
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REPORTER

Four former Saipan Little League Baseball Inc. officials will be assisting CNMI district administrator James Ada in running the affairs of the youth baseball program in the Commonwealth.

Ada, who also works as Department of Public Works secretary, appointed ex-SLLBI president Mike Borja, vice president Annie Flores, secretary Piding Tenorio, and volunteer statistician Remy Celis as his assistant DAs.

He presented the four SLL veterans to the media last Thursday at his DPW office in San Jose. "I've appointed them to help me in the operations and other auxiliary matters in running the affairs under the DA's office. We will work in establishing contact with the board of the Saipan, Tinian, and Rota Little Leagues," Ada said.

"We plan to sit down with the local board. Ask them what kind of assistance they need and what can we give to them."

Another project for Ada and his assistant DAs is to help prepare Tinian in hosting next

See LITTLE on Page 26

JON PEREZ
CNMI Little League district administrator James Ada, right, introduces his assistant DAs, from left, Mike Borja, Piding Tenorio, Annie Flores, and Remy Celis inside his office at the Department of Public Works in San Jose.